

THE 13. 6. 9. 32.
SUFFICIENCY

Of a Standing REVELATION *in General,*

AND

Of the Scripture REVELATION *in Particular.*

BOTH

As to the Matter of it, and

As to the Proof of it ;

AND

That NEW REVELATIONS

Cannot Reasonably be Desired, and

Would Probably be Unsuccessful.

In Eight SERMONS,

Preach'd in the

CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. PAUL, London ;
At the LECTURE Founded by the Honourable
ROBERT BOTTLE, Esq; in the Year 1700.

By OFSPRING BLACKALL, D. D. Chap-
lain in Ordinary to Her MAJESTY.

London: Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-fryars, near
the Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1708.

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The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation.

A
SERMON

PREACH'D at the
Cathedral-Church of St. Paul,

January the 1st, $\frac{1699}{1700}$

BEING

The First for the Year, 1700, of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;

St. LUKE xvi. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets;
let them hear them:*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto
them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets,
neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

By **OFFSPRING BLACKHALL**, Rector of St.
Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in Ordinary to
His Majesty.

The Second Edition.

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the Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1707.

St. L U K E XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay father Abraham : But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

TH E S E Words contain some of the Discourse that passed between *Abraham* in Heaven, and a certain Rich Man in Hell ; occasion'd by a Request which he had made in the foregoing Verses, in the behalf of his five Brethren whom he had left alive upon Earth ; that *Abraham* would be so kind as to send *Lazarus* to them, to testify to them, lest they also should come into that place of Torment. And the general Design of them, and indeed of the whole Parable of which they are a Part, is to assert the Sufficiency of those Means which God had thought fit to use to bring Men to Repentance, particularly by granting them a standing Revelation of his Will ; and the probable Unsuccessfulness of any other Method that we could propose, and perhaps might think more proper for this Purpose.

And when these Words were first spoken, it was with a special Reference to the State of the *Jews*, and to that light, and those Means of Salvation which was afforded to them, at the time when our Saviour began his Preaching ; when all the standing Revelation of God's Will, was contained in the Books of *Moses*, and in the Writings of the Prophets.

But since then our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, a more Credible Messenger than *Lazarus* from the dead, has come himself in Person to assure us that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and to shew us the means of attaining that, and avoiding this ; and God having rais'd him up from the dead after he had been crucified by the *Jews*, has given sufficient Assurance to the World of his Divine Mission ; And that Je-

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his did and said such things, and that he died and rose again, we have the Testimony of his Apostles, and others, who were Eye and Ear-witnesses thereof, and who in Confirmation of their Testimony were empowered by God to do as great Miracles as Jesus himself had done; and lastly, of what was done and taught by our Saviour and his Apostles, we have very credible Records still remaining, *viz.* the Books of the New Testament; the Authority of which is at least as well proved to us, as ever the Authority of the Old Testament was to the *Jews*: So that we now have plainly more and stronger motives to Repentance, than the *Jews* before our Saviour's time had; we consequently do stand in less need of new Miracles and new Revelations than they did; and therefore the Argument in the Text, as it may be applied to us who live now, is much stronger than as it was here urged by *Abraham* with Reference to the *Jews*, while they had only *Moses* and the Prophets.

And thus in my Discourse upon the Words, I shall now consider it, *viz.* as if the Request made by the *Rich Man* in the Behalf of his Brethren, in the two foregoing Verses, were made now in the Behalf of those to whom the Revelation of the Gospel has been given, but without Success; and as if the Answer here returned to it by *Abraham*, had been suited to the present State of things.

And from the Words, thus largely understood, I shall take occasion to speak to these Three Points.

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present standing Revelation of God's Will, contained in the Books of the Old and New Testament is abundantly sufficient to persuade men to Repentance; if they are not unreasonably Blind and Obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (I add, they have also Christ and his Apostles;) let them hear them.*

II. I shall shew that having already such good grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong motives to Repentance, it is an unreasonable Request to desire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will Repent.* And

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to shew, That in case God should

should condescend to gratifie men in this unreasonable Desire (working every day new *Miracles* before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the Dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be perswaded by this means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be perswaded, tho one rose from the dead.*

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present standing Revelation of God's Will, contained in the Books of the Old and New Testament is abundantly sufficient to perswade men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably Blind and Obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.*

And, I think, that if the standing Revelation which God hath made of his Will in the Holy Scriptures, can upon any account be thought insufficient to effect this Design, it must be upon one of these two Accounts; viz. Either, 1st, Because no standing Revelation can be sufficient for this purpose; Or, 2. Because there are some particular Defects in that standing Revelation which we have in the Holy Scripture, which render it not so sufficient for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a standing Revelation might be.

1. It may be pretended that no standing Revelation can be sufficient for this Purpose. I am now therefore to enquire with what Reason this can be pretended.

And in speaking to this Point, it does not lie upon me to prove that God could not reveal his mind afresh to every Man in every Age of the World, if he so pleased; for there is no question but that the same God who in *divers manners spake in times past to our Fathers by the Prophets*, could, if he pleased, speak to every one of us their Children, in such manner as he then spake to the Prophets themselves; so that we might be all immediately taught of God as they were. But every thing that may be done is not expedient to be done. And whether this Method would be expedient or not, will be hereafter enquired.

Neither does it now lie upon me to prove, that this way which God hath thought fit to take to instruct the greatest part of the World, viz. by a standing Revelation, is the best way, and the most like to be effectual of any that could be used. Of this I shall likewise have occasion to speak somewhat hereafter.

But what lies upon me at present to make good, is only this, That a standing Revelation of God's will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be sufficient to perswade Men.

And if there be any ground for the contrary Pretence, I think it must be, either 1. Because all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all times, cannot at once be committed to Writing : Or, 2. Because there cannot be sufficient Evidence given to satisfy a Rational Man that any Writing that is said to be of Divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so.

1. It may be said, That all matters necessary to be known and done by Men, at all times, cannot be at once committed to Writing : Because every Age of the World produces new Opinions, which whether they be erroneous or not, cannot be judged by a *Criterion* that was given many Ages before these Opinions were broached : and as the World grows older in Years, it likewise improves in Wickedness, which cannot be restrained and suppressed by an old Law which was made before several Instances of those Wickednesses that are now practised were either known or thought of. And if it were not so, what need would there be of such a Number of Books as are written in every Age to direct Men how to distinguish between Truth and Error, and what Opinions to fix upon in that great variety of Opinions that are offered to them ? or what need would there be of so many new Laws as are daily made in every Common wealth to restrain the growing Extravagancies of Mankind, and to keep them within due Bounds ? So that if there be any Necessity at all of divine Revelation to teach Men the Belief of Truth and the Practice of Righteousness, it is necessary that there should be a new and fresh Revelation made, at least as often as any new Error is broached, or any new piece of Villany is practised in the World.

But to this Objection against the Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation, I suppose a full Answer will be given in these two particulars.

(1.) That there is no Arguing from the Wisdom and Power of Men, to the Wisdom and Power of God. It may be granted to be impossible for a Man to write such a Book as shall be sufficient to confute all the Errors that can possibly at any time afterwards spring up ; Or to compile such a Body of Laws as shall be sufficient to prevent or punish all future Crimes ; but what is impossible with Men may be possible with God ; who has a perfect foresight of all the Errors that will ever be broached, and of all the Wickedness that will never be practised by Men to the end of the World, To a Being of infinite Wisdom and Knowledge it may be not only possible, but very easy so to contrive a Revelation, designed by him for the Direction of future Ages, that no Addition shall ever after need to be made to it. Nay, indeed,

(2.) The Thing it self, that is, That a *standing Revelation* should be thus perfect ; that it should be so contrived at once, and at first, as to be sufficient to answer all the ends of a Divine Revelation as long as the World shall last, is not very hard to be conceived.

For tho' Error be infinite, Truth, at least all Truth necessary to be believ'd, is infinite and limited ; and after a Divine Revelation is once given, no more is necessary to be believ'd in after Ages than was at first ; nor will there ever be more things necessary to be believed to the end of the World, unless God shall please to add some new Revelation to the former. And this Revelation of all necessary Truth once made, being given to Men that are endued with Reason, nothing more is, or ever will be needful for the discovery and confutation of all Errors that can possibly spring up in after Ages, but only a right understanding of the truths already delivered and a right Use of Reason in making Inferences, and drawing Consequences therefrom. And this is all that is pretended to by the Books of controverſie that are written in every age : the design of them is not to declare new Truths, or to establish new Articles of Faith, but only to shew that those Opinions which

they

they represent as false and erroneous, are either in themselves, or in their true Consequences, contrary to some Maxims that are already receiv'd as true.

And it is no less easie to conceive that a *standing Revelation* may be at once so contrived as to be for ever sufficient to direct Men in all Points of Practice: Because altho' 'tis possible that every Age may afford new Instances of Wickedness, yet the Law that they are all Transgressions of, may be but one. And the Rule once given is a perpetual Direction, not only what to do, but likewise what to avoid; and this, as well in those Instances of Wickedness which may be invented afterwards, as in those which were in Practice before the Rule was made. For he that giving Direction to a Traveller in his Way, bids him *keep strait forward*, shall not need, (if he speaks to a Man of Reason) to tell him, over and above, that he must be careful to avoid all Turnings to the right hand or to the left; and much less shall he need to give him a particular Account of every Turning that he is to avoid. And tho' in Time to come there would be many more By-ways and Turnings out of the Road than there are at present, yet the same one Direction, *to keep strait forward*, will be as full and as sufficient a Direction then, as it is now.

And the Necessity that Humane Law-givers find themselves under to be every Day repealing former Laws and adding new ones, is not caused by an absolute Impossibility of making at once such a Body of Laws as might be sufficient for all after times; but arises (as I suppose) Partly from the Nature of Humane Laws, which are for the most part Negative and Prohibitive only; and by such a Law nothing is rendered unlawful but what is named; and to name at once every thing that is then, or may be in all after Ages needful to be prohibited, would indeed be a work of very great Difficulty: Partly from the Nature of that obedience that is due to a mere humane Law; which is only an external Obedience and to the letter of the law; and that indeed must needs be a law, or a body of laws of a prodigious Bulk, and very difficult to be contrived

at once, which in the Letter thereof shall comprehend and give Direction concerning every Action, and every Mode of Action that are necessary to be done or forborn, in order to the preserving Justice and Peace among Men; partly, from the little regard that Men generally have to the good of Posterity, which makes them only careful to contrive such Orders and Constitutions, as they hope will suffice to preserve Peace in their own time, leaving it to those that come after, to take the like care for themselves in their times; Partly, from the Weakness and Ignorance of the wisest of Men, who not understanding exactly the Tempers of all their Subjects, cannot know certainly what effect their Laws will have, till after they have been for some time experienc'd; And partly, from the unexpected Difficulty that is sometimes meet with in the Execution of a Law, which may make it necessary afterwards to enforce it with a greater Penalty, or to take some further care than at first was thought needful to see it executed.

But none of these Reasons of the necessity of new Laws among Men are of any force to shew that it is also necessary that God should be every Day making new Declarations of his Will, and that no standing Revelation can be sufficient for all Times; for the Laws of God are positive and commanding, enjoining the truest and heartiest Love both to God and Men, and every natural and proper Expression thereof, and by consequence prohibiting every Affection of Mind, and every outward Act that is contrary thereto, whether it be expressly named or not; And the Obedience that we owe to a Divine Law, is the Obedience of the Heart, and of the whole inner Man, such as looks beyond the Letter to the Design and Intention of the Law, and avoids as carefully whatsoever is contrary to the Reason of the Law, as if it had been forbidden in the most express Words: And God being King for ever and ever, has the same Relation to all Men in all Ages, and cannot but be supposed to design the good Government of his Subjects in after, as well as in former times; And he also, understanding fully the Tempers of all his Subjects, knows before-hand what effects the Laws he gives them will have, and can never be disappointed in his Expectation; and so can never be obliged to repeal or alter any of his Laws, by an unforeseen Experience, that they are not so convenient, or so effectual as he thought they would be; And lastly, he, having all Power in his Hands, and a sovereign and uncontrollable Dominion over all can appoint what Penalty he pleases to the Transgression of his Laws; can at any time Convict Transgressors by his own unerring knowledge only, and the Testimony of their guilty Consciences without other Witnesses; and has it in his own single Power, without any help of others to execute, when-ever he will, whatever Penalty he threatens.

Thus, I think, it appears that a *standing Revelation* may be so well contrived, as to be sufficient for all times; that all matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all times may be at once committed to Writing.

2. But Secondly, Tho' this be granted, it may be still further Objected against the Sufficiency of a standing Revelation, that it can hardly be

sufficiently attested ; that there cannot be sufficient Evidence given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any such Writing, which is said to be of Divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so ; And that, (1.) Because there is no way but I witness to be sufficiently assur'd that any Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it ; (2.) Because there is no way to be sufficiently assur'd, that the Author of such a Book did not design to impose upon his Readers ; And (3.) Because no Man can be sure, that he himself was not deceived in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to him ; or in the Truth of any other matter which he has related, as of his own Knowledge.

(1.) It may be said, that there is no way but Eye-witness to be sufficiently assur'd that any Book was written by the Person that is said to be the Author of it.

But that is very strange, that there should be no other way to be sufficiently assur'd of the Author of any Book ; and yet that there are a great many Books in the World, ancient as well as Modern, the Authors whereof were never in the least doubted of ; who yet, I suppose, did not use to call together a Company of Men to stand by, and see them write those Books which they intended to Publish.

It seems then, that either there may be, besides Eye-witness, sufficient Reason to believe that a Book was written by the Person under whose name it goes ; or else that all the World has been extremely credulous in receiving an infinite Number of Books as written by such and such Authors, without sufficient Assurance thereof. But I believe the Truth is, there are some Men, who for Reasons best known to themselves, (but which may some of them be easily enough guessed at) will not allow that to be sufficient Evidence that a Book was written by a Prophet or an Apostle, which they must and do allow to be sufficient Evidence in any other Case of the like Nature.

For in other Cases we make no doubt to receive a Book as written by such an Author, if he owns himself to be the Author of it ; or if it be shewn written with his own Hand ; or if they that are the Publishers of it, declare that they had it from him as his own ; or that they Transcribed or Printed it from a Copy which they knew to be of his Hand-writing ; or if it passes current in common Fame and Report to be his, and his most intimate Friends believe it so, and he himself does not disown it, and there be none else that pretend any claim or title to it. Where these or most of these Circumstances do concur, we never doubt but that the Person said to be the Author of such a Book, is so indeed ; unless there be some very clear Reason, grounded upon the known incapacity of the Person to write in such a Language, in such a Style, concerning such a Subject, or the like, whereby it may be demonstrated, (that whoever was) he could not be the Author of it. The Truth is, Now adays, (and I suppose the Case was much the same formerly) whoever is the true Author of any Book, finds very little Difficulty to make Men believe that the Book is his ; the greatest Difficulty is for a Man to conceal himself, in case he be not willing to be known to be the Author of it.

And when once a Book is generally receiv'd as written by such a Person, (when, I say, 'tis thus receiv'd) in that Age in which it was first publish'd, and by those that were in the best Capacity to inquire and to judge who was the true Author of it; they that live in after times never think it reasonable to question the Authority thereof, unless there be, evidently something, either in the Language, Dialect or Style; or else in the matter of the Book, as in the Relation of some piece of History, the References to some ancient Customs, the Citations out of other Authors, or the like; by which it may be clearly made out that the Book cannot be of such Antiquity as it pretends to, or could not be the Writing of that Person who is reported and has been commonly taken to be the Author of it.

Upon such Reasons as these, a great many Books are every day received as written by such and such Authors; and tho' we cannot be so sure of a thing that we believe upon these inducements, as we are of what we see with our own Eyes; yet such Reasons as these are by the general Consent of Mankind judged to be sufficient in a Matter of this Nature, which is hardly capable of better Proof. And for a Man to disallow in one Case that same Evidence of the Truth of a matter of Fact, which in other Cases of the like kind he allows to be sufficient; for a Man to receive a Book as written by another Person, and not to receive a Book as written by a Prophet or an Apostle, when he has as much Reason to receive one as the other, and no more reason to reject one than the other, is not Judgment or Discretion, or reasonable caution, but manifest Prejudice and Partiality. But,

(2.) It was further said, That tho' we might be well enough assured that a Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; there is no way to be sufficiently assur'd that he who was the Author of it did not design to impose upon his Readers.

It seems then, there is no way to be sufficiently satisfied that any Man is an honest Man, and fit to be credited; that he does not lye in every thing he says, and intend a Cheat in every thing he does. For if a Man may be believed in what he says, he may as well be believ'd in what he writes; And if he may be trusted in one concern, he may be as safely trusted in another, unless good Reason can be shewed to the contrary.

But in judging of humane Nature in general, Men commonly judge of others by themselves: What they are inclined to, they think is the Inclination of Mankind; what they allow themselves in, they think others, (what ever they may pretend) make as little scruple of as they do; what they freely practice, they make no doubt other Men would practice as freely on the same Occasions, and upon the same inducements; so that when any Man is so very suspicious of the Honesty and Veracity of other Men, it gives but too just ground to think that the Reason of his Aptness to distrust all others, is his Consciousness of his own evil Designs, and of the little Regard that he himself has to Truth in his own Assertions. And if those he has to deal with should refuse to give any Credit to any thing that he affirms, because, according to his own declared Opinion, very

little Credit can reasonably be given to the Report and Affirmation of others, I do not see with what Reason he can blame them for so doing.

Not but that, after all, 'tis possible that a Man may (tis doubtless what has been done by some) give out a Report, or write a Book on purpose to deceive Mankind; But nevertheless, I say, that it ought not without very good Reason to be suspected that this is any Man's Design; and that we may have Assurance enough that a thing is not, which yet we must grant as possible to have been—Particularly as to the Matter we are now speaking of.

First; In case the Author of any Book, or of any Report relates a Matter of Fact, of which there are not, nor well could be, any other Witnesses but himself; as if he says that he has received from God such a Revelation, with order to publish it to the World, or that he himself was an Eye or Ear-witness that such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; the Credibility of such a Report, whether written or spoken, depends, partly upon the Nature of the Report its self; Partly upon the Credit of its Author, and partly upon the Proofs that he gives of his Honesty and Veracity in that particular. And where there is a full Concurrence of all these, that is, When the Matter of the Report is credible in its self; when its Author is a Person of Credit; and when he gives the best Proofs that can be of his Veracity in that particular; there is no Reason to Reject his Testimony, there is sufficient Reason to give Credit to it.

1. If the matter of his Report be credible in its self. And if what he reports be, that he himself has receiv'd such a Revelation from God, with Order to Publish it to the World; I say that this Report in the general is a credible Report; because it is very agreeable to the Goodness of God, and therefore not unlikely, that he should impart to Men, by a special Revelation, such things as are very useful for them to know, and which could not be known, or not so well; not so fully, clearly and certainly any other Way as by Revelation; and 'tis certainly not incredible, that he that has given us a Tongue to utter Words, and Skill to express thereby our Thoughts to one another, should have power and means to reveal and express his own Mind in such a manner, that a Man may understand his Meaning; and 'tis likewise certainly not incredible in its self, that God intending to declare his Will to Mankind, should make use of the Ministry of a Man for this Purpose, and having made known his Will to one Man, give him Commission to Communicate the same to others.

If therefore there be any thing incredible in the Report of a Divine Revelation, it must be in the special Matter of it. But altho' the particular Matter of any such Divine Revelation be such a thing as we could never have found out by Natural Reason; I say, it is nevertheless credible as a Matter divinely revealed; if it implies no Contradiction; if it be not, contrary to natural Reason; if it be not repugnant to a former Divine Revelation that is well attested; and if it be a Doctrine worthy of God; that is, If in its true Consequences it has no Tendency to encourage Sin; but on the contrary, has a plain Tendency to promote the

Practice of Piety, and Virtue among Men. Against such a Revelation as this there can be no just Objection made from the Matter of it; There is no Improbability that such a thing as this should be the Subject of a divine Revelation.

Or if what he reports be, that he himself was by when such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; In this case the Matter of his Report is credible in its self, if what he says he was an Eye or Ear-witness of, be a proper Object of those senses; if it be not an impossible thing; if it does not imply a Contradiction. And in this Case, the Difficulty, the Strangeness, the Uncommonness of the thing; it's being a thing that was never known to be done or said before, or which no account can be given of by reason or natural Causes, is no just Exception to the Truth of it. There is nothing in this kind absolutely incredible, but what is plainly impossible. But,

2. The Credibility of any Report, (supposing the Matter of it to be Credible) depends, in good measure, upon the Credit of its Author.

And then a Man may reasonably be thought an Author, or a Witness of good Credit, in Matters of his own knowledge, when he appears, and by all his other Words and Actions shews himself to be, grave, sober, considerate, and in his right Wits; when he is a Person of unblemish'd Reputation; when he was never known to lye, or feign, or deceive in other Cases; when he gives no just ground to suspect that he is an intriguing or designing Person; And lastly, when he himself is no Party to the Cause, has no worldly Interest carrying on in it, no design of Honour or Profit, or other Temporal Advantage, that, to appearance, can be served by his giving such Testimony; when he will be neither the better if his Report be credited, nor the worse if it be not believed. Such a Witness as this cannot reasonably be excepted against.

3. But 3dly, Even such a Report made by such a Person, is still further Credible, in case he gives also the best Proofs that can be given, or that the Case will bear, of his Veracity in that Particular.

And 'tis one very good Token of a Man's own firm Persuasion of the Truth of what he says, if he gives his Testimony in a grave and serious manner, and if he appears to have at that time a good Sense of Religion in his Mind. Upon which Account a Solemn Oath, by which God is called upon to witness the Truth of what is said, is reckoned the greatest Assurance that ordinarily can be given of the Truth of any humane Testimony; and therefore by Evidence given upon Oath all Questions of the greatest Consequence to Men in this World, are finally decided; *An Oath for Confirmation is to Men an end of all Strife.* (Heb. 6. 16.) Seeing therefore that the great Credit that is given to an Oath, is grounded upon that serious Sense of Religion which the Witness is supposed to have in his Mind, when he declares that he speaks as in the Presence of Almighty God; whenever there is good Evidence given by any Person of the same serious Sense of Religion, his Testimony, tho' without the Formality of an Oath, is not less credible.

Again, It is a further Token of a Man's firm Belief of what he reports

or affirms, in case, the Matter of his Report being such as is naturally influential upon Practice, he himself lives and acts in all respects agreeably thereto; And especially if in consequence thereof he declines making such Gain and Profit to himself as 'tis probable he would have done had he been otherwise perswaded; and denies himself those worldly Pleasures and Sensual Gratifications which other Men not so perswaded, do freely allow themselves in; and voluntarily undertakes such Labours, and endures such Hardships as it can hardly be supposed any Man of another Persuasion would undergo.

But the surest Token that any Man can give of his Veracity, is persisting in the Evidence he has once given to the last; when no Promises of Wealth, Honour or Promotion can perswade him to forbear speaking the thing which he has seen and heard; when being brought before Kings and Rulers, and straitly threatned to hold his Peace, he is thereby rather the more emboldened to speak; when being racked and tortured to retract his Evidence, he continues in the midst of the greatest Torments to witness the same thing that he did before; And in fine, when having a certain Prospect before him of losing all that can be dear to him in this World, and even his life it self, unless he will either go back from what he has said, or at least forbear to repeat and confirm it; he willingly and chearfully seals his Testimony with his Blood.

Such Assurance as this we may have of the Honesty and Veracity of a Person that witnesses a thing only of his own private knowledge; And this being the best we can have, he's an unreasonable Man that desires more, or says this is not sufficient.

But Secondly, in Case the Author of any Book, or of any Report, relates a Thing that was done or spoken publickly, in the Sight or Hearing of many others besides himself, we may have still greater Assurance, of his Honesty and Veracity, and of the Truth of the Report its self; And we have so, (we have, I think the greatest that can be,) if, after the Report is published, especially if it be a matter of great Consequence to the World, it be not contradicted by any of those that were present; and much rather, if they all, or a great many of them, agree in testifying the same thing especially if they also are Persons of the like good Credit, and if they also give the same Proofs and Tokens of their Veracity that he did.

Such Evidence as this of the Veracity of any Author in what he writes, is beyond all reasonable Exception. And therefore when many, and especially when all these Evidences of Truth and Honesty do concur, I think we may be sufficiently assured that he did not design to impose upon his Readers. But,

(3.) If we may be well enough assur'd of the Author of any Book, and also of his Honesty; yet it was further Objected, that this Author, whoever he was, could not be sure that he himself was not deceiv'd, in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to him; Or in the Truth of any other Matter of Fact which he has related as of his own knowledge.

But first, If he could not be sure of his own Inspiration, or of a Re-

revelation made to himself; How then could any Man now a days be sure of the same, if God should vouchsafe to speak to us now, as 'tis said he did in former times to the Prophets and other inspir'd Men, by himself or an Angel? So that this Objection, if it be well grounded, cuts off not only all reasonable Belief of former Revelations, but likewise all reasonable Belief of any Revelation that can now be made, to our selves or others. And 'tis to no Purpose to offer at any thing to convince those of the Truth of any revelation who are of Opinion that even the infinite Power and wisdom of God cannot make such a Revelation of his Will to them as would be credible; such as they should reasonably judge sufficient for their Conviction.

This therefore is all that I shall say to this Part of the Objection; that if they suppose, as they seem to do, that Almighty God cannot any ways so reveal his Will to any Man, as that the Prophet himself can be assured that it is a Divine Revelation; they suppose God to be of less Power and Skill than a Man is, who can utter his Mind in such a manner to another, that the other shall have no doubt who it is that speaks, or what he means: But if they will but vouchsafe to grant, that God could now speak, or otherwise reveal his Will, in such manner to us, as that we could not possibly have any Doubt, whether it was the Voice of God or an Angel or not, then I say there can be no Question but that he might speak in as plain a manner to Men in former times; and there is almost as little question but that he has done so.

But many (it may be said) have pretended to Inspiration or Revelations, and, we have Reason to believe, have thought themselves inspired, when yet the Matter they have said they were inspired with, or which they have said has been revealed to them has been such as has clearly evidenced to all rational Men the Falsity of their Pretence.

True; And so likewise many Men have thought themselves at such a Place, in such a Company, hearing, seeing, speaking or doing such and such things, when yet, as it proves afterwards, they have been all the while only in a Dream: But what then? Does it follow that because a Man may think himself awake when he is in a Dream, he can therefore never be sure that he is awake? And as little does it follow, that because some Persons of weak or disordered Brains have thought they have had Revelations, therefore no sober and judicious Man in his right Wits, can ever be sure of a Revelation.

But suppose a Man at the first, being (as it may well be imagined he must be) in a great Surprise and Astonishment at the Strangeness and Novelty of the thing, should not be very certain of the Reality of the Revelation, should not well know whether he was awake or asleep; yet certainly the same Signs which are sufficient afterwards to satisfy other Men of the Truth of his Inspiration or Revelation, must be allowed to be sufficient to satisfy himself of the same thing.

And therefore, If *Moses* (for instance) when God first spake to him in *Horeb* out of the Burning Bush, (*Exod. 3.*) was in some doubt whether he was in a Trance, or awake and in his right Mind; whether he really

ard a Voice, or only dream'd so. It can't well be supposed that he continu'd in the same doubt afterwards, when having at God's Command, *cast his Rod upon the Ground, it became a Serpent*; (Exod. 4. 3. 4. and having at the same Divine Command *taken it up by the Tail, it became a Rod again in his Hand*: (ver. 6. 7.) And when after that by his first putting his Hand into his Bosom it became *leprous as Snow*, and after his putting it in the Second time, *it came out like his other Flesh*.

Or if it can be imagined that he might possibly take all this to be only Continuation of his Dream; or at least might not in all this while be aware that it was not a Dream, it is not conceivable, however, that in all the time that he was travelling from *Horeb into Egypt*, he should not ever be so thoroughly awake, so as to be sure that he was awake; and if he was, that he should not in all that time make such Reflections upon what had passed, as either to perceive plainly that it had been only a Dream, or else to be very certain that it had not been a Dream, but a Reality.

Or if it can be conceived that his Amazement and concern at what had happened was so great, that, that in all this time he might not be so well come to himself, as to be sure that he had a true Divine Revelation; yet I think it was not possible that he should remain in the same uncertainty; after he had been in *Egypt* for some while, and had wrought not only those two Miracles over again in the sight of the *Israelites*, whereby they were fully persuaded of his Divine Mission; but likewise all the other great Signs and Wonders mentioned in the 7th, and following Chapters of *Exodus*, some of which the *Egyptians*, and even the Magicians themselves could not but acknowledge *were done by the Finger of God*.

But this, It may be it will be said, is proving one doubtful thing by another as doubtful, a Revelation by a Miracle: for it was further urged in the Objection, that no Author of any Book could be sure that he was not deceived in any other matter that he has related as of his own Knowledge; that 'tis possible there might be Mistake in the Sign and Proof of the Divine Revelation as well as in the Revelation its self; that 'tis possible that the Author of the Report (whether it was the Prophet himself, or any other Man who has reported the Miracles done by the Prophet, as matters of his own Knowledge) did imagine he saw things which he did not see, and that he heard things which he did not hear.

But if this be supposed possible, that any Man, and much more that several Men agreeing in the same Report, the Organs of whose Senses were rightly disposed, and who by all their other Actions and Discourses appeared to be sober, and considerate, and judicious, should yet in the day time, and in a clear light, and when they were sure they were broad awake, be mistaken in the plainest Matters of Sense; then there is no such thing as certainty in the World; Then they that make the Objection can be no more sure of what they themselves see and hear than other Men can be; and 'tis to no purpose to hold an Argument with such as dare not believe their own Eyes and Ears. The only sense whereby, I think, such Men can be convinced, must be Feeling; And it will be well for them if they can carry the same Scepticism with them into the other World, and when

they are compass'd about with the Flames of Hell, can be able to doubt whether it be a real or a painted Fire, whether they are tormented by that Flame, or not.

Leaving these therefore to be convinced in the other World, as being think, not capable of Conviction here; I shall content my self with having said, what, I suppose, is enough to satisfy others, That the Witness of a plain matter of Fact may be sure of the Truth of what he witnesses; and that 'tis possible for God to speak so plainly to Men, that they may be certain they have had a Divine Revelation; and that such Evidence may be given of the Veracity of an Author, and of the Authority of a Book as is sufficient to satisfy a reasonable Man.

And by this, and what was said before, I hope I have made it appear, that a Standing Revelation of God's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested, as to be sufficient to effect its design, viz. to bring Men to Repentance. Whether the Standing Revelation which we have in the Holy Scripture be sufficient for this Purpose, will be matter of Enquiry in the next Discourses.

In the mean time, what has been already said may serve to dispose us to hear without Prejudice the Arguments that may be offered to prove the sufficiency of the Holy Scripture. For,

1. If it be possible that there may be such a Standing Revelation, it is very probable that there is one; for from that natural Notion that we have of the Goodness of God it may be fairly argued, that he is not wanting to Men in the necessary means of Salvation; and therefore it being evident that there are not new Revelations made every day, it may be reasonably concluded that the Reason is, because there is already some standing Revelation of God's Will extant that is sufficient to direct us in the way to Happiness. And,

2. If there be already any such Standing Revelation extant, it may be strongly presum'd, that it is that which we have in the Holy Scripture; because there is no other Book, that we know of, which has such good Evidences of Divine Authority and Inspiration as that has.

Let us then be prepared to inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Faith and Religion with unprejudic'd Minds, with a sincere Love and Desire of Truth, and with a Resolution to hear Reason and to be convinced by it. And above all, (which indeed is the best Preparation for truth, and the best Security against Error) let us in the sincerity of our Hearts, apply our selves to God for his help and direction; and that our Prayer may be effectual, let us be careful to approve our selves to him, by a conscientious discharge of all those Duties of Piety, Justice, Temperance and Charity, which are clearly taught even by Natural Reason; and be readily disposed to practice whatever else we shall learn to be our Duty by any farther Illumination; for if any Man do his Will, he shall know of the Divine whether it be of God. (Joh. 7. 17.)

*The Sufficiency of the Scripture Revelation,
As to the Matter of it.*

A
SERMON

PREACH'D at the
Cathedral-Church of St. Paul,

February the 5th, $\frac{1699}{1700}$.

BEING

The Second for the Year, 1700, of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;

St. LUKE xvi. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets;
let them hear them:*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto
them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets,
neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

By OFSPRING BLACKHALL, Rector of St.
Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in Ordinary to
His Majesty.

London: Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-fryars, near
the Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1707.



St. L U K E xvi. 29, 30, 31.

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And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

TH E first thing which I propounded to do in Discoursing on these Words, was, to endeavour to shew, that the present *Standing Revelation* of God's will, contained in the Books of the Old and New Testament is abundantly sufficient to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (they have also Christ and his Apostles,) let them hear them.*

And if that *Standing Revelation* which God hath made to us of his will in the *Holy Scriptures* can upon any Account be thought insufficient to effect this Design, it must be, I think, either 1. Because no *Standing Revelation* can be sufficient for this Purpose; Or, 2. Because there are some particular defects in that Revelation which we have in the *Holy Scriptures*, which render it not so sufficient for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

I have therefore, in a former Discourse upon these words, endeavoured to shew in general, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's will may be so well contrived, and so well attested as to be sufficient for this Purpose.

I proceed now in the second Place,

2. To consider whether that *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scriptures*, be such a Revelation

lation; whether it be sufficient to perswade Men to Repentance, and fully to direct them in the way to Happiness; Or, whether there be not some particular defects in this Revelation, which render it not so sufficient for this Purpose as 'tis possible a Standing Revelation might be.

And if there be any such defect in the Holy Scripture, it must be either in the matter of it, or in the proof of it: And if it be in the Matter of it, it must be, either that it does not give us sufficient Directions what to do, or that it does not propose sufficient Motives to perswade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I shall shew, (1.) That the Holy Scripture gives us sufficient directions what to do. (2.) That the Motives which the Scripture proposes, are sufficient to perswade us to do what it requires; And, (3.) That we have sufficient Reason given us to convince us of the Truth and Authority of the Holy Scripture, and consequently of all the Doctrines which are taught by it.

(1.) I shall shew that the Holy Scripture gives us sufficient Directions what to do.

And of this there can be little doubt among those that believe the divine Inspiration and Authority of the Holy Scripture; because to them its own Testimony of its own sufficiency is a Proof thereof beyond all exception. For, if, as the Apostle says, *2 Tim. 3. 16, it be profitable for Doctrine and for Reproof, and for Correction, and for Instruction in Righteousness*; it is plainly profitable for all the Purposes for which we can desire a divine Revelation. And if, as he says in the next verse, *it was given to make perfect the Man of God (that is, the Man whose Business it is to teach and instruct others,) and thoroughly to furnish him unto all good Works*, it cannot be deficient in delivering all such Rules and Directions as are necessary to be given by a Pastor of the People committed to his Care. And, if, as the same Apostle had said at the 15th Verse of that Chapter, *it be able to make*

make us wise unto Salvation, we have no reason to desire to be wiser than this excellent Book can make us. And if all this could truly be said by the Apostle, before the Canon of the New Testament was completed; if it could be said by him, of those Holy Scriptures which *Tsmotby* had known from a Child, that is, of the Books of the Old Testament only, much more may it be now said of the Books of both Testaments together.

But to speak at large of this Point, at present, would be too great a Digression from the Design of these *Lectures*, which were intended only against *Infidels*, not against any Sect of Christians; and such they pretend to be; such (because they hold the Foundation Christ Jesus,) they may in Charity be allow'd to be, who do chiefly differ from us in this Article, and deny the Sufficiency of Scripture, only because they are resolv'd to maintain some gainful Doctrines and Practices of their own Church, which they are sensible have no Warrant from Scripture, and so can be maintain'd no other way but by affirming that they have been delivered down to them by Tradition, and that unwritten Tradition is a necessary Supplement to the written Word, and of equal Authority with it.

For between us and *Infidels* who reject the Scripture, the Sufficiency of the Scripture as a Rule of Faith and Manners, is hardly matter of Controversy: For these do not reject the Scripture because it teaches too little, but rather because it teaches too much; Because it teaches Doctrines above their Reason, and commands such Duties as they do not like to Practice; and if it taught less than it does, they would be more ready to own its Divine Authority.

But nevertheless, even these Men (that they may leave no Stone unturned) will be sometimes discoursing upon this Point; and although those Books of Holy Scripture which are now extant, and which are now generally receiv'd, do teach much more than they themselves are willing to believe and Practice, yet, that they

may, as much as they can, unsettle the belief of others, do not stick to argue against the Christian Religion from this Topick, and to affirm that the Books of Holy Scripture which are now receiv'd do not contain the whole Will of God. For there were, say they, in former times, several other gospels and epistles, and other tracts, designed to instruct Men in the Christian Religion, which were written by the Apostles or other inspired Men, and which were consequently of the same Authority, in themselves, with those which are now receiv'd into the Canon of which nevertheless we have nothing now left, but the Names and Titles, or some imperfect and uncertain Fragments; so that it may well be doubted, whether those few Books which are now remaining, are sufficient to instruct us in all necessary Points of Knowledge and Practice. And of this matter of Fact, there is, they say, some Evidence even from the Scripture it self; For *S. Luke*, in the beginning of his Gospel, takes notice, that many before him had taken in hand to set forth a Declaration of those things which were surely believ'd among Christians; that is, had written and publish'd Narratives of the Life, Actions, Miracles, Preaching, Death and Resurrection of our Saviour. But there are no Histories of this kind, no Gospels now extant, that were written before *St. Luke's*, except only *St. Matthew's* and *St. Mark's*; and if there had been no more extant at that time, it would have been very improper, they say for the *Evangelist* to have said, that many had written upon this subject, when he spake only of those two. And that there was matter enough for several such Narratives (so that tho' they were very different Gospels, they might nevertheless be all true) we are told by *St. John*, who wrote his Gospel the last of the four Evangelists, *John* 20. 30. *many other signs truly did Jesus in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book*; and again, Chap. 21. Ver. 25. *There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the World its self could not contain the Books that should be written.*

Now if it be true, that there were several other Books formerly extant, of which are now lost, that were written by the Apostles and other inspired Men, and consequently by divine Inspiration; either these were needless when written, (and it is unreasonable to suppose that any Book written by divine Inspiration was needless) or else the loss of these Books is a Loss to Religion; and we cannot be well assured, that those which we have now remaining do sufficiently instruct us in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice.

But admit the truth of this matter of Fact, *viz.* that more Books were written by the Apostles, or inspired Men, than are now extant, which I will not now dispute, because I think it needless, because I think it may be granted without any Prejudice to the Christian Cause; although there be none, at most but very slender Evidence of it;) nay, admit more than is upon any good Grounds alledged; *viz.* not only that several, but that every one of the Apostles and immediate Disciples of Christ, every one that had heard him Preach, and had been a witness of his Life and Miracles and Resurrection, and had received the Miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost, write a distinct Gospel giving an Account of some of the most remarkable

Passages of our Saviour's Life which he had been a witness of; and did likewise as he had occasion write Epistles or other Tracts for the use and instruction of the Christian Church; every one of all which Books, if they were now extant, and as well attested as the Books of the New Testament are, would be of equal Authority with them, because dictated by the same Spirit, by which all the Apostles were led into all Truth, and had all things that Jesus had spoken brought to their Remembrance; yet I say, it would by no means follow from hence, either that those Books which are now lost (if indeed there are any lost that were written by the Apostles) were needless when they were written; or that those which do now remain are not not sufficient. And a very little Consideration of the State of things as it was then, and as it is now, will make this which I have said very plain.

For the Case then was thus: The Gospel of Christ was to be preached to the whole World by a few Persons who had been Eye-witnesses of his Miracles, and were enabled by the Power of the Holy Ghost to confirm their testimony of him by doing the like Miracles themselves; And that this great work might be accomplished within the Term of their Life, it was necessary that they should quickly disperse themselves into all parts of the world, one going this way and another that, according as they had agreed among themselves, or were directed by the Spirit; And in this Division of Countries, every one had a large Province assigned to him, so that having much work to do in a little time, he could not well stay long in one place; And upon this Account it might be very proper for him after he had preached the Gospel in one City, and made a good number of Converts, and ordained Elders and established a Christian Church there; when he went thence to leave behind him in writing the Sum of what he had before preached among them, for the help of their Memories, for the Direction of their Pastors, and to prevent any Misrepresentation that might afterwards be made of his Doctrine by ignorant or designing Men; And after he was gone from thence, he might have frequent occasion to send them Letters, either to confirm them in their Faith, or to caution them against some Errors which he had heard were springing up among them, or to correct some faults in their Discipline or Manners.

By this means, I say, it might well enough be (though there be no Evidence that it was so) that in the first Age of Christianity, there might be besides occasional Letters, as many distinct Gospels as there were Apostles, every one writing a Gospel for the proper use of those Churches which he himself had planted, and in the Language that was best known to them. And this, if it was done, might be no more than might then be necessary when it was not so easy as it is now (since the increase of Commerce and Navigation and the invention of Printing) to communicate and disperse the Books that are publish'd in one Country, to other Countries that are far distant. Besides, if this could have been done then, it can't well be supposed that a Gospel written by any other of the Apostles, who had never been in that Province or Division, and of whom they had never heard, perhaps more than only his Name, should be at first of so great Authority to them, as a Gospel written by that very Apostle, by whole Ministry they had

been converted, and of whose Miracles they themselves had been witnesses.

Thus it might be; (and if it was so, it might be agreeable to the Divine Wisdom and Goodness so to order it) that before those Books of the New Testament which we now have could be well dispersed, and upon good Attestation received in all Christian Countries, some particular Churches, and especially those most remote from *Juden*, should have for their present use, other Books written by some other of the Apostles, containing the same form of sound words; and relating the same things concerning the Life and Doctrine of our Saviour that these do.

And that some of those many Books which might be written by the Apostles or other Inspired Men upon this Subject, should be lost, is no Marvel at all: 'tis rather a Wonder (considering the Poverty of the first Christians, and the constant Persecutions they were then under, and the many Revolutions of Government that have been in Christendom since that time,) that so many as we have now left could be preserved for so many Ages before Printing was found out. And those were of all the most like to be lost, which were published in rude and barbarous Countries, and which were written in some Language that was peculiar to one Nation only: And those the most easie, and consequently the most probable to be preserved, which were published in the Learned part of the world, and written in the most Learned Language then in use.

But altho' a greater Number of inspired Books than are now extant, might be necessary in the first Age of Christianity, before the Christian Churches, then newly planted in all Countries of the then known World, could have Communication with one another; it cannot be argued from hence that those Books which we have now remaining, are not sufficient for the present time, and for all the time that has passed since the other Books were lost. But rather, it may very reasonably be presumed, that there was nothing more, for Substance, in those Books, which are supposed to be lost, than there is in these which are now remaining; so that the loss of them may be no real Loss or Detriment to Religion, and those which remain and are now receiv'd in all Christian Churches, may be abundantly sufficient to instruct us in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice.

And there is indeed no Reason to think they are not, seeing some of those single Books which we have now, were written for this very purpose, were designed as *Compendiums* of the whole Christian Institution: For St. *Luke* wrote his Gospel, *that Theophilus, might know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed*; *Luke* 1. 4. And if this was the Evangelist's Design, it can't be supposed but that he thought he had put in his Gospel whatever was necessary or very material: And St. *John* in the same place where he acknowledges that he had omitted the Relation of many things which Jesus did, says *John* 20. 30, 31. that he had written the things contained in his Gospel, *that Men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have Life through his Name*: By which it appears that he thought he himself had written enough in his Gospel to persuade Men to believe in Christ, and to direct them in the way to eternal Life. There being therefore in those Books of the New Testament which we now have, several Abridgments of

the whole Christian Doctrine, it cannot with any Reason be pretended, that all these Books together are not sufficient fully to instruct us therein.

Besides; The Gospel of Christ that was preached suppose, by *St. Thomas* in *India*, or by *St. Simon* in *Africa*, or by any other of the Apostles in Countries remote from *Judea*, or without the Bounds of the Roman Empire, was undoubtedly the very same Gospel that was preached by *St. Peter*, and *St. Paul*, or those other of the Apostles whose Books are now extant, and receiv'd by the Catholick Church; for they were all taught by the same Master, Christ; and were all enlightn'd by the same Holy Ghost: so that if any of them did, (as 'tis reported they did) write any Gospels for the present Use of those particular Churches which they had planted; tho' they might be somewhat different from any of the four Gospels which we now have, in the Expression, or perhaps in the Relation of some particular Passages of our Saviour's Life, which our Evangelists have omitted: (just as the four Gospels which we now have, do differ from one another) yet for Substance they must needs have been the same with these, and with one another, if indeed they were all true Relations of the matters of which the Authors thereof had been Witnesses; so that if we had them all now, they could altogether teach us no other Doctrines than are taught in the Books of the New Testament.

Nevertheless, I do not deny but that if we had more Books of this kind than we have; that if we had all the Books that were written by the Apostles, or their immediate Successors who had been taught by them, they might be of very good use to us, to help us to understand more readily and easily those Books which we have (as now we receive from some Portions of Holy Scripture, great Light, to help us to understand, and to put a right Interpretation upon others:) But perhaps it was for this very Reason that the Providence of God did order no more to be written, than were written, or has suffered those to be lost that are supposed to be lost, that it might cost us some Pains and Study to understand our Religion; that so our Knowledge as well as our Practice being in some measure the Fruit of our own Industry, might be a proper Subject of Reward.

In short, that there were more books in the first age of Christianity, written by Apostles or other inspired Men than are now extant, or than if extant can be well prov'd to be of their Writing, is a point which I believe cannot be now upon any certain Evidence either affirmed or denied: But if it be granted, I say however, there is no Reason to infer from thence that those which we now have are not sufficient. For if there be a God and a Providence, and if there be any Truth in the Scripture-Declaration of the Love of God to Mankind, and that *he would have all Men to be saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*, most certainly the necessary Means of Mens Salvation is a proper Subject of the divine care. And if so; it can't be thought but that the same good Providence which (as is now supposed) took care for the writing of more Books when more might be necessary, has likewise taken Care for the Preservation of many of these Books as are now sufficient.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with, will not grant that there is such a particular Providence of God ; yet if they will but allow that God is just: that he is not a hard Master, expecting *to reap where he has not sown*, I think they must allow that all things necessary to our Salvation not knowable by Reason, are taught in the Books of Holy Scripture which we now have, because there are no other Books extant which we have reason to receive and accept as Divine Revelation.

Or if they deny this, it will lie upon them to produce those other Books which we ought to receive besides these, and to give good Evidence to the World of their divine Authority. Which when they have done ; or if they shall but only shew that there is as good Reason to receive them as these ; we must own our selves to blame, if we shall not then take them also into the Canon of Scripture.

But till that shall be done, what hath been already said is enough to shew that the Holy Scripture is a compleat Rule both of Faith and Manners. Especially considering (as was noted before) that when-ever the Insufficiency of Scripture in this respect, is urged by those who do not believe the Scripture (which are the Persons I have now to deal with,) it can be only for Cavilling sake: the true Reason of their Backwardness to receive it as a divine Revelation, being not because it teaches not enough, but because it teaches more than they are willing to believe, and commands more than they are disposed to practise. For I cannot imagine that these Men do truly desire more Duty than is laid upon them in the Books of Scripture now received by the Christian Church ; But what they may most reasonably be thought to desire, is, either some better Encouragement to undertake that difficult Task which the Scripture lays upon them, or some better Evidence that the Scripture is a divine Revelation.

I proceed now therefore to the second thing propounded, which was,

(2.) To shew that the Motives which the Scripture proposes are sufficient to persuade Men to do what it requires.

Now Hopes and Fears are the great Springs of Action ; and the greater the Good we hope for, or the Evil we fear, the stronger do they move and incline us to Action ; And therefore, how difficult soever the Undertaking be, (so it be but possible ;) if the Motives are proportioned to the Difficulty, they must be granted to be sufficient Inducements to undertake it.

But that the Task or Business required of us, is possible to be done, needs not to be proved now, because it must be granted by those who say they believe they should be persuaded to do what is required, if they had better Encouragement ; for no Arguments or Motives whatsoever can reasonably persuade a Man to undertake a thing that he believes impossible.

Supposing it therefore possible ; I say that whatsoever Difficulty there really is, or we may apprehend there is, in a Christian Life ; if any Motives that could possibly be propos'd to us can be thought sufficient to induce us to undertake it ; most evidently, those Motives which the Gospel proposes, are so ; because better or greater cannot be so much as conceived or imagined ; seeing both the good things which it promises to per-

swade us to Virtue, and the evil things which it threatens to deter us from Sin, are, as to the matter of them, the greatest that we are capable of enjoying or suffering; and consequently the most probable to raise our Hopes, and to excite our Fears to the highest Pitch.

For the Arguments that do most strongly persuade us to any thing, are from Interest; from the Profit and Advantage we shall reap by doing it; from the tendency it has to make us happy; and Happiness consists in being perfectly free from all Pain and Trouble and Vexation; and in the full and free Enjoyment of whatsoever is pleasing and delightful to us.

But now both these the Gospel gives Assurance of to all those that believe and obey it; that is, that they shall thereby be freed from that intolerable Pain and Misery, which the Wicked and Unbelievers shall be condemned to, and also that they shall thereby be inflated in the perfectest and compleatest Happiness both of Body and Soul; In a Happiness far greater than they do or can enjoy now; nay, in a Happiness much greater than any they can now have so much as a Conception or Idea of in their Minds. *For Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man the things that God hath prepared for them that love him.* (1 Cor. 2. 9.)

But there is, besides, a remarkable Circumstance which does much enhance the Value of any good, and likewise much aggravate the Evil of any Pain or Misery; viz. its *Duration*: For how great soever the Good or Evil proposed to persuade us to any thing, are in themselves; yet if they be but of short Continuance, if they will soon expire and be at an end, we reckon it not worth while to be at much Pains to obtain such a short-liv'd Good, or to avoid such a transient Evil; But in this respect also, the motives both of hope and of fear which the Gospel proposes to us, do far surpass all those Persuasive or Inducements which Sin can offer: for the most we can hope to escape by the Commission of any Sin, is the Pain and Suffering of a few Weeks or Years, or a temporal Death; which last, yet, we cannot be so vain as to hope to escape clearly, for we can at most but delay it for a short Season; and on the other side, the greatest Good we can propose to our selves, or so much as hope to obtain by any Sin, is the Pleasure of a short Life: In which hope, Men are likewise very often most sadly disappointed; their sinful Gratifications commonly bringing with them, or drawing after them, much more trouble and vexation even in this World, than the little Pleasure they can reap from them is sufficient to compensate for. But if it were not so; If the Pleasures of Sin were certain and sincere: yet they are but for a Moment; They can be but short, because our Life it self is but short; being (as St. James says) *a Vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.* (Jam. 4. 14.)

But the Motives of both kinds, which the Gospel proposes, have in this respect also, (that is, in Respect of the Duration of the good or evil proposed) all the Advantage that is possible. For the Misery we shall escape and the Blessedness we shall attain, by yielding Belief and Obedience to the Gospel, are, both of them, of *eternal and endless Duration.* *A Worm*

at never dieth, *a fire that never shall be quenched; everlasting Punishment, eternal damnation, everlasting fire, everlasting destruction; the blackness of Darkness, for ever; A Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where they shall be tormented Day and Night for ever and ever.* Mark. 9. 46, 48. Matth. 5. 46. Mark 3. 29. Matth. 18. 8. 2 Thess. 1. 9. Jude 13. Rev. 20. 6. 14. 11. These are the Evils which the Gospel threatens to Sin: And these be not sufficient to deterr Men from it, what can be sufficient? What will can that Man be supposed to be afraid of, who is not afraid of everlasting Burning? A greater Evil cannot be threatned; and he who is not scared by this, would certainly be less scared by the Threatning of a less evil. And on the other side, *Everlasting Life; a Crown that fadeth not away; a Kingdom that cannot be moved; an eternal Weight of Glory; fulness of joy in the Presence of God; and Pleasures for evermore at his right Hand;* these are the good things promised to Obedience; and could greater things be promised than these? could we our selves if we were put to desire what we would, desire more? and the Promise of unspeakable and everlasting Blessedness, be not sufficient to prevail with us to undertake a Godly and Christian Life, certainly nothing can be sufficient. If God should make never so many Revelations of his Will to Mankind, he could not propose greater Encouragement to Obedience, than he has done already in the Gospel: And if those good things which he has promised, do not move us, 'tis not because they are not great enough to move a wise and considering Man, but because we are so bent upon Sin that we will not give way to any considerations that might serve to restrain us from it.

In a Word; The Gospel Motives to Repentance and Obedience comprehend all that we can fear or hope for: so far therefore as Fears or Hopes can work upon us, there is plainly nothing wanting in that Standing Revelation that God has made of his Will, by *Moses* and the Prophets, and especially by *Christ* and his Apostles, to make it successful, that is, to perswade Men to Repentance, if they will but hear what they say and give Credit to it.

But 'tis not, perhaps the Infidels will say, a better Rule that they want, than the Scripture is, or better Motives to perswade them to lead their lives according to it, than the scripture proposes; but what they chiefly want is some better Evidence, some greater certainty of the truth of the Scripture.

This therefore was what I propounded to do in the next place; *viz.* To shew that we have sufficient Reason given us to convince us of the Truth and Authority of the Holy Scripture, and consequently of all the Doctrines which are taught by it.

But because the handling of this Point would take up too much time, I shall chuse to defer it; and conclude this present Discourse with an earnest Exhortation to all those that do sincerely believe the Gospel, to consider often and seriously of those great Motives which it proposes to perswade Men.

For tho' we live in an Age of great Infidelity; wherein some are bold enough to strike at the very Foundation of all Religion, and to dispute at

least, if not deny the most evident and undeniable Truths of it; and others think they pay respect enough to the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind, if they do but grant themselves to be Deists, and wherein, even among those that openly profess the Christian Religion, there is in a great many a Spice and Tincture of Atheism and Infidelity; and tho' they do not actually disbelieve the Gospel truths, yet they believe them so coldly and faintly, that their Faith may rather be called an Inclination to believe, than a full Persuasion; I say, even in this incredulous and unbelieving Age, I am nevertheless verily persuaded, that for one Man that is ruin'd by Infidelity, many hundreds are ruin'd by Thoughtlessness and Inconsideration; that where there is one that is wicked, because he believes nothing of the Gospel-motives, nor that there is any such Place or State as Heaven or Hell, there are a great many that do believe these things, and yet continue in their wicked Course, because they never take any time seriously to consider what Heaven and Hell are; and that vast, that infinite difference that there is between these two States; and how much it behoves them to use all Diligence to attain that, and to avoid this.

Leaving therefore those who believe little or nothing of these things to my following Discourses, wherein I hope to prove the Truth of the Gospel Revelation, beyond all reasonable Exception; I shall now address myself to you that do believe these things, and who, every time you meet together in the Church do repeat all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and declare your Assent thereto. And what I would desire of you is; that you would frequently think of those things which you profess to believe, that you would meditate much and often thereupon, that you would seriously consider the meaning thereof.

Particularly, That Summary of the Gospel Motives to Faith and Repentance before spoken of, that great and last Article of the Christian Creed, *The Life everlasting*; Consider what it means, and do not content your selves only with saying every Day that you do believe an everlasting Life after this, but meditate likewise every Day, or very frequently at least, what an everlasting Life is, and of what Sort and Kind that everlasting life will be.

Now Life is a state of Sensation; by this a Living Body is distinguished from a dead Carcass, that the living Body feels what is done unto it, and is affected thereby either with Pain or Pleasure; whereas a dead Carcass is not capable of either, hath no Sense or Feeling of any thing. When therefore in repeating the Creed, we declare that we believe we shall live again, after our Death, the meaning is, that we shall be hereafter in such a State of *Sensation* as we are in now; that in that Life we shall be as sensible of Pain or Pleasure, as we are in this Life.

But then what makes the great difference between this Life and that, is, that this is short, transient and momentary, that if it be pleasant, it is soon over, and that if it be painful it will not last long; whereas that, such as it is once, such it will ever be; for that's the meaning of a Life everlasting; 'tis a Life that will never be ended; A Life that will continue to all Eternity.

And now that we come to speak of Eternity, tho' the Word has a fix'd meaning ; yet how are our Thoughts lost and bewildered when we set ourselves to meditate thereupon? When ye speak of a thousand, or ten thousand, or even of a Million of Years, we have some Notion of what we say ; but when we come to multiply these Thousands, and Millions, by thousands, or ten Millions, or by Millions of Millions, our thoughts are not capacious enough to conceive, and our mouths want Words to express that infinite length of time which these Numbers do comprehend ; and yet all that these Numbers denote, is nothing in Comparison with Eternity.

If the whole Sea were to run out Drop by drop, what a prodigious length of time would this take up! and yet in time this would be done ; and they that live for ever would live to see the vast Caverns of the Ocean without a drop of Water left in them : And which is more yet, there would be no part of their Eternity then spent, they would then be as far from dying as they were at first.

Or if only once in ten thousand years, one of the smallest Sands or Dusts were to be taken from the Earth, they that live for ever would live to see this vast Bulk of the Earth by these slow and imperceptible Degrees wholly removed, not so much as a Grain or Atome of it left ; nay, and even in this prodigious, this unconceivable length of time, their Life would not be in the least diminished, they would have the same boundless Eternity still before them that they had, when the first Sand was taken away.

But what do I speak of these little Numbers, these Moments of time, they may truly be called, in Comparison with Eternity? For even all those Years in which the whole Earth might be removed, if only one single smallest Dust thereof were to be taken away once in ten thousand years, I say, all these Years may be expressed in Figures in a Line of a few inches long ; But if the whole Expanse of Heaven were written quite over with Figures, from the top to the bottom, and from one side to the other, even all these Figures, tho' set so close that there was not room left for one more, would not denote or express Eternity ; And when all these numberless Millions of years were spent, he that lives for ever, would be as it were) but just then beginning to live ; and his Sight and Prospect of the time before him, would be still as boundless as ever.

Thus you see what is eternal Life ; or rather, you see what it is not : It is a length of time that cannot be expressed in Words, or signified by Figures, or conceived in thought : It is a length of time to which all that we can have any positive Notion of, bears no Proportion.

And when we believe that we shall live such a Life, after this short Life is over ; does it not highly behove us to think of it now ; and to make the best Provision that is possible that we may be happy in it?

And this leads me to the other Branch of Meditation on this Subject, which we ought likewise frequently and seriously to dwell upon in our minds ; namely of what Sort and Kind this eternal Life will be.

And as 'tis Life, 'tis (as was said before) a State of Sensation ; and as it is an everlasting Life, 'tis a State in which we shall for ever feel our selves, either in Pain or at Ease.

And if there were no more in it than this; tho' the *Pain* we shall endure were the least of those Pains wherewith we are now afflicted little Pain or Aking of one Joint or Member only; Or tho' the *Pleasure* we shall then enjoy, were one of the least of those Pleasures wherewith we are now delighted; yet when we have added *Eternity* to these, what infinite Difference is there between these two States? And how well we need think it worth all the Pains and Labour that we can take in this World, to secure to our selves a Portion in that better Sort of everlasting Life, in that Life in which there is no *Pain*, tho' there be but little *Pleasure*.

But still our Thoughts are short; we have not yet a just Notion of the Difference between these two States. For if we believe the *Scripture* (as I speak now to those that do believe it) that *everlasting Pain* which the wicked will be condemned to, is not a light or gentle Pain; but the sharpest, the acutest, the most tormenting that can be endured; and that *eternal Joy* which we have a good Hope of by the Gospel, is likewise the greatest, the fullest, the compleatest that we are capable of; for in representing the former to us, the *Scripture* all along expresses the Torments of Hell by such Pains as are here most afflicting to us; as the Biting of a *Guawing* of a *Worm*, the being beaten with *Stripes*, the noisomeness of *Brimstone*, and the Burning of *Fire*; And on the other side, when it would present to us the Happiness of the Blessed, it does it by resembling the heavenly Joys, to such Pleasures as do here upon Earth most sensibly delight such as are the Pleasures of a spacious, rich and commodious Dwelling, the choicest Delicacies to please the Taste, of the rarest Melody to delight the Ear, of a Crown, and a Kingdom, and an exceeding Weight of Glory and of whatever else can gratifie or please any of our Senses.

Now tho' these Representations or Descriptions of Hell and Heaven are not perhaps to be understood literally; the *Scripture* herein speaking according to the Strictness of Truth, but according to our present Capacities and Apprehensions, who have now very little Notion of any Pain or Pleasure but what affects the Senses of our Body; yet thus much may certainly be concluded from those Descriptions of these two States which we meet with in *Scripture*; that both the Torments of Hell and the Joys of Heaven, are as great as they can possibly be; far beyond any thing that we feel or enjoy, or can have any Notion of; And in a Word, that as the *Pain* of Hell is *endless*, so it is likewise intolerable, and that as the *Joy* of Heaven is *perpetual*, so it is likewise *unspeakable and full of Glory*.

And now after this short tho' very imperfect Representation of the two vastly different States of Men in that other, and everlasting Life that will begin when this is over; I think I may fairly ask again, what God could have done more, either to deter us from Sin, than to threaten Hell Torments to those that live in it; or encourage us to Obedience, than promise to those that continue in well doing, the unspeakable Happiness of Heaven? Certainly, if these *Motives* will not prevail upon us, no other can be proposed, that would prevail.

Nay further; Tho' I have hitherto spoken to you as to *Christians*

which believe the Scripture, and that there will certainly be another Life after this, even such a Life as I have been speaking of, an *everlasting Life* of *perfect Happiness*, or *extream Misery*; yet if you have at all attended to the Representation that I have made to you, of the *Pains of Hell*, and of the *Jays of Heaven*, and of the *Eternity* both; I should now dare to address my self to you, even tho' I thought you believ'd very little of these things; and methinks I should not doubt, that I might prevail with you, and persuade you to Repentance, by the *Gospel Motives of Heaven and Hell*; even altho' the *Revelation* thereof were not certain and undoubted, altho' there were some *just Reason* to question the *Truth* of them.

For put the Case that it is very *uncertain* whether there will be an eternal Life or no; Nay, put the Case that it is ten to one, that it is much more probable, that there will not be any such Life after this; Yet when we consider what *Eternity* is, and what a vast Difference there is between living in *perfect Joy*, and in *everlasting Burning*; and when we consider that the *Shortness* of this present Life; and how *little* we can lose in it by abstaining from Sin; and how *little* we can suffer in it, by the strictest *Temperance and Virtue*, even the bare *Possibility* that there will be an eternal Life, tho' we had no certain Revelation, and no other very good Assurance of it, would be abundantly *sufficient* to deter us from Sin, and to encourage us up to well-doing. For if we live well here, and there be really an eternal Life, it will be happy for us that we have made this Preparation for it; but if there should indeed be no other Life after this, we shall be then *Losers* by what we have done; we shall be then in as good Condition as those who will be in who did not believe it, nor live in Expectation of it; And that *Trouble* which the Exercise of Piety and Virtue now costs us, is not worth speaking of; it is no more than we ought in Reason and Prudence to bear, altho' at the same time we believ'd it to be very uncertain whether there would be any such eternal Life or no.

For this is what we call and account *Wisdom* in all other Cases; viz. to provide not only against *Certainties* or high *Probabilities*, but (when it may easily and conveniently be done) even against *Possibilities* too. We see how unwise a Man for the World, who being in a good way of getting, spends all as fast as it comes in, when he has no present Need to spend much; and lays up nothing against Old Age, when, if he lives to it, he will be past his Labour, and not in a Capacity to get enough to support himself; And yet of all those that do wisely make some Provision for old Age, none in ten perhaps lives to it. But nevertheless the bare Possibility that one may live to old Age, and the very great Inconveniences that he will suffer, if he shall have nothing then to live upon, make it very advisable for every one of the ten, to lay up somewhat (if he can do it) against that time; And he, of the ten, whose only Lot it be to live to be old, is not a wiser Man for making such Provision, than the other nine are; yet, in the Event, will be never the better for their Labour. But the case therefore that there is the same, or even a much greater *Uncertainty* whether there will be an eternal Life after this; yet when we

consider *what an eternal Life is*; when we consider that if there be a Heaven, and we can procure our Portion to be there; we shall be happy, infinitely and unspeakably happy to eternal Ages; And that if there be a Hell, and we do not take Care to avoid it; our Lot will be extremely miserable, and we shall be *tormented Day and Night, for ever and ever, in the Lake that burns with Fire and Brimstone*: And when we consider withal, that *very little Trouble*, in Comparison, that it will cost us to attain *that* to avoid this; that 'tis but the Labour of a few Years, and that the more we can suffer by it, is the Loss of a little Sensual Pleasure, for which, after this Life is over, we should be never the better; or the enduring of some little Pain or Hardship which will be soon over, and for which, if no Good should ever come of it after this Life, we shall however be then never the worse; Considering, I say, thus, the infinitely vast and wide Difference that there is between being eternally happy, and eternally miserable, it is enough that it is *possible*, 'tis more than enough, that 'tis *probable* that there will be such a state; and if we neglect to make Provision for it, because we are not *absolutely certain* that it will be, it is plain, that we do not act so prudently in this, as we do in other Cases that are of infinitely less Moment and Concern to us; and that (as our Saviour says) *The Children of this World, are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light*.

Now this is the most that the professed Atheists or Infidels can pretend. They'll say perhaps, that for their own parts, they do not believe the Being of a God, or a Judgment, or a Life to come; and that they do not see any good Reason to believe these things; forasmuch as all the Proofs that are brought for them, do, in their Judgment fall short of Demonstration; and they are resolved not to believe them, till such Proof thereof shall be offered, as they can make no exception against; not till they see with their own Eyes that there is a Heaven and a Hell, or till they shall have a Messenger sent to them from thence, purpose to assure them thereof: And be it so as they say, that there is not an absolute Certainty of the Truth of these things, that we have not yet such sure a Proof of them, as ocular or mathematical Demonstration would be; yet this is the most they can say, they themselves cannot pretend that there is any Demonstration on the other side. They are not sure, they say, that there will be another Life, or that it will be everlasting; Well: but are they sure that there will not be such a Life? is it absurd or impossible that there should be such a Life? this I'm sure they can't say; and all that they have yet dared to say, is only that those Proofs thereof, that we rely upon are in their Opinion sufficient. But suppose them as insufficient as they can think them, yet still, if they are not sufficient to prove the probability of what they are brought to prove; or if not so; yet still a future Life, if it be not certain, nay, if it be not probable, however may be possible; And if it be only possible that we may live for ever, and that we may be eternally happy, or eternally miserable; this Possibility alone (considering what an infinite Difference there is between these two States,) ought to reason to put us upon taking the best Care we can, that if there be an eternal Life, we may be eternally happy in it.

But after all, our Proof of this and other great truths of our Religion, is not so weak and slender as these Men would represent it; it is indeed as good as the Nature of the thing will bear; and he's an unreasonable Man that requires a better Proof of any thing than it is capable of.

This therefore is what I should now in the next place, proceed to do; viz. (3.) shew that there is sufficient Reason to give Credit to the Scripture, wherein these Truths are plainly taught. But this being too large a Subject to be handled now, I have already said, I would defer it to the next Opportunity.

F I N I S.

*The Sufficiency of the Scripture Revelation,
As to the Proof of it. Part I*

A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D at the
Cathedral-Church of St. Paul,

March the 4th, $\frac{1699}{1700}$.

BEING

the Third for the Year, 1700, of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;

St. L U K E xvi. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets;
let them hear them:*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto
them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets,
neither will they be perswaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

J O S P H U S B L A C K H A L L, Rector of St.
Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in Ordinary to
His Majesty.

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the Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1707.



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And he said, Nay, father Abraham: But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

HAVING in my first Discourse on these Words endeavoured to shew in general, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived, and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate; I came the last time to consider whether that *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be such a Revelation; Or whether there be not some particular *Defects* in it, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be, as I said, either in the *Matter* of it; or in the *Proof* of it; And if in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give *sufficient Directions* what to do; Or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I propounded and shew; (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which it proposes are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires: And (3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us, to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And the Two first of these I have already done. I proceed now to the Third, *viz.*

(3.) To shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it; And that I shall presume to be *sufficient Reason* in this Case, which we readily accept and allow of as *sufficient* in all other Cases of the like Nature.

And I suppose it will be granted that we have *sufficient Proof* given us of the *Truth* of the Things contained in *Holy Scripture*, and of the *Authority* of it, if it can be shewn, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books of Holy Scripture* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof; 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give all Credit to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded; And, 3. That if the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *Scripture* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

These things therefore I shall now endeavour to make good.

But in speaking to this Point, I shall (for Brevity's sake) confine my Discourse only to the *Books of the New Testament*, Partly, because these are the *Books* wherein our *Christian Religion* is chiefly taught; And especially because I think there are none who receive the *New Testament*, as of *divine Authority*, that do (or indeed can, with any Reason) reject the

1. Then, I am to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books of Holy Scripture*, (of the *New Testament* in particular) were written by those *Persons* that are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

This indeed is a Point that it does not properly lie upon us to make Proof of; For as a Man's Possession of an Estate, is alone a good and *sufficient Title* to it, till a better is shewn by the Person that endeavours to eject him: so it is here; These *Books* are generally receiv'd as written by such and such *Persons*: These *Authors* have the Name, these have (as were) the Possession of them; and that's Title enough, if no other could be produc'd, so long as no Evidence is offered to shew that any other *Persons* have a better Title to them. It lies on them therefore who deny that the *Books* are *theirs*, to give a Reason of what they say; either by bringing some special Matter out of the *Books* themselves, whereby it may be proved that they could not be of *their* Writing; or by producing some credible and authentick History testifying that they were written by some other *Persons*, and not by them. And till they can, and shall do this (which I am persuaded can never be done) we may very well refuse to produce any positive Evidence to affirm or prove their Title, their Possession being a good Title enough, till a better appears. And a Tenant might as good Reason refuse to pay Rent to the Person, of whom he took the Estate, and to whom he hath hitherto paid Rent, and whose Right it is not at all controverted, until he shall suffer his Writings to be perused and examined, and by them make it plainly appear that he is the proper Landlord; as any Man can now refuse to give that Credit to these *Books*, as written by the *Apostles*, which has been given hitherto, and is still

still given by all Christians, unless he may have now as good positive Evidence of their being *written* by the *Apostles*, as might have been given thereof at first, and as, it may be presumed, was given before their Title to them was so universally acknowledged.

But nevertheless what a Man is not under any Obligation to do for the asserting of his Right, he may do wisely enough for his own Satisfaction. And it must needs be a Satisfaction and Pleasure to a Man, altho' his Title to his Estate be not at present controverted, if in looking over the Writings and Evidences of it, he sees plainly how it descended to him by lineal Succession from Father to Son for many Generations past; and how it came at first to his Ancestors, by a clear and fair Purchase from the former Possessors; or by Donation from the Prince, in the Division of a war or conquer'd Country; and if he also finds ancient Terriers agreeing in the same Measure, and Boundings, and exactly describing the same Estate which he now possesses; and if moreover, looking far back, he sees, that upon some Disputes or Law-Suits that have formerly been concerning it, Judgment has been always given on his Side. It cannot but please him, I say, that upon such a Search into Antiquity, he finds that he is so very well provided to make out his Title, if there should ever be any occasion for it; altho' by reason of the long and quiet Possession, that he, and his Ancestors before him, time out of Mind, have had of it, he has no just Cause to fear he shall ever meet with any Disturbance.

And so it is here: These Writings, *the Books of the New Testament* are generally acknowledged to be *written* by the *Apostles of Christ*, and their Authority is at present uncontested; It may therefore reasonably be presumed, (especially by those who have not Parts or Learning or Leisure to examine into the Reasons of such things) that they would not have been so universally acknowledged and revered as they are upon this Account, but upon very good Grounds; tho' what the Grounds there are, they have not yet inquired; Their being in Possession is alone Reason enough to acknowledge and assert their Title. It lies upon them that deny these *Books* to be *theirs*, to produce satisfactory Evidence of their being forged or counterfeit; and till they shall produce some Evidence thereof that has a Shew and Appearance of Truth, we have no Reason to be staggered in our Belief by their bare, however bold and confident, Denial of their Authority; And much less shall we need to give our Reasons for receiving them as written by the Apostles, till our Adversaries shall offer some Reasons why we ought not to receive them as such.

But nevertheless, because we see there are some, in this incredulous Age that shew a good Will to deny the Authority of these *Sacred Books* and whose Interest it would be to prove them *Spurious*; and because we cannot tell what unwarrantable Practices their Inclination and Interest may put them upon; nor what Writings or Evidences, plausibly forged or counterfeited, they may hereafter produce: it cannot be amiss for us to inquire and see; and it cannot but be a Pleasure and Satisfaction to us (who hold our Hope of eternal Life chiefly by these Writings) to find a

consider how well provided we are to detect and disprove any such Forgeries, if they should be offered, by being able to produce, in Opposition hereto, as good positive Proof that these Books are genuine, as such a Matter is capable of, much better than I believe can be produced for the Authority of any other Books of the like Antiquity.

And it gives us some Satisfaction in the Belief we have been bred up in, that these are the genuine Books of the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, to find that they are receiv'd as such, not by a small Party of Men, not by that Church and Nation only to which we belong, but by *all Christians* dispersed in *all Parts* of the World; and likewise that they *all* agree with us in the same Testimony, *viz.* that they received them, as such, from their *Fathers*. For that these Books should be thus generally received and acknowledged, by so many different and far distant Nations, without some good Grounds, is not conceivable; because it can neither be imagined that the Christians of the present Age, dispersed in all Countries, should combine together to say that they received these Books from their *Fathers*, as the genuine Writings of the Apostles, if they had not so receiv'd them; nor that their Forefathers, in any of the Ages past, should have all agreed together, to put a Cheat upon their Posterity, by delivering down to them these Books as written by the Apostles, when they themselves had no good Reason to believe them so, or when they knew the contrary.

It is a further Satisfaction to us, to observe and consider, that the *Authority* of these Books is as well proved as it can be, not only by oral, but also by the best *written* Tradition; The Christian Writers of all Ages, citing them (as they had Occasion) as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*; And that, as well before the Canon of the *New Testament* was defined and declared by *Councils*, as since.

And lastly, it gives us very good Satisfaction that *these Books* are the *genuine Writings* of the *Persons* to whom they are ascribed, that we do not find they were ever excepted against, as *spurious* and *counterfeit*, in *those times* when it would have been most proper to have made the Exception; and by *those Persons* whose Cause and Interest it would have served very much to have proved them Spurious, if it could have been done.

For the proper *time* to have made this Exception to *these Writings*, was *when*, or *soon after*, they were first publish'd; when it would have been easy to have proved them Spurious if they had been so; and no less easy to have brought positive Evidence of their being Genuine, if indeed they were Genuine; either by the living Testimony of the *Authors* themselves, or of others that knew their Writings; or by producing the original Copies under their own Hands; And therefore their being then received as the Writings of the Apostles, by those who were best able to know whose Writings they were, and their being not (for ought appears) excepted against, upon this Account, at *that time*, is a very good Argument that there was no just Ground for any such Exception.

And the most likely Persons, they whose Cause and Interest it would have served most, to deny that these Books were written by the reputed *Authors*

Authors thereof, were the Enemies of our Religion, the *Jews* or the *Pagans*; who neither of them wanted either Malice or Wit, to alledge as Fact that they could have justified the Truth of, in Disproof of the Christian Religion. It is therefore no small Satisfaction to us to observe, *that* they never argued against the Christian Religion from this Topick; *that* they never denied that the Books which the *Christians* received as *written* by the *Apostles* were genuine; Nay, that *Julian* himself, one of the subtillest, as well as of the bitterest Adversaries of the Christian Faith, did yet expressly own that the Books read by the *Christians*, as the Books of *Peter*, *Paul*, *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*, were indeed theirs.

After all indeed it must be owned that we have not such Demonstration that the Books of the *New Testament* were *written* by the *Apostles*, as self-evident, and cannot possibly be contradicted; for the Matter is self-not capable of such Demonstration. But we have such Demonstration of it as cannot be contradicted with any Reason; We have as good Assurance of it as we have, or can have, of any Matter of that kind; We have as good Evidence of the Truth of it, as, supposing it to be true, we could have it; and more than this cannot be desired. We are as *morally certain* that *these Books* were *written* by the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, as are that any other ancient Book was *written* by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; There being no Argument, by which it is, or can be proved, that any ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it, which does not prove the Authority of *these Books*, rather more strongly, than it does the Authority of any other Book; And there being no Argument, that is, or can be urged, against the Authority of *these Books*, which may not, with as good Reason, be urged, to disprove the Authority of any other Book of the like Antiquity; nay indeed of all the Books in the World, ancient or modern, the Authors of which are not now living, or of whose Writing the Books ascribed to them no living Evidence can be produced.

For what is there that can be said to disprove, or to render suspected the Authority of *these Books*, but only that there is a Possibility that Things may not be as we believe them to be? It may be (the *Atheist* or *Infidel* will say) that *these Books* were not *written* by the Persons under whose Names we receive them, but by some others; It may be (he'll say, for Instance) that there never was such a Man as *Matthew the Publican*, afterwards an *Apostle* of *Christ*; or if there was, yet, it may be, that the Gospel that goes under his Name was not of his Writing, but is a Book of a much later Date; it may be, that it was written by some crafty Priest, no longer ago than the last Age; and that he and some others in Confederacy with him at the same time that they forged this Gospel in the *Greek Tongue*, did likewise make and contrive all those *Translations* of it into several Languages that are now extant, some of which pretend to very great Antiquity, and which are all made with such an Appearance of Truth, and with such Congruity, the several Times in which they are said to be made, that none of the Learned Men of the present Age have been able to discover the Fraud; and it may be also, that when they forged the Gospel itself, they forged like

wise all the *other* Books that are pretended to be written by several Histo-
 rians and Divines, in divers Languages, and in several Ages of the World
 for Sixteen hundred Years past, in which this Gospel is either testified to be
 written by *St. Matthew*, or is cited or commented upon as his; and it may
 be likewise that at the same time, that they trumped up all these Books in
 one Country, they had their Confederates and Correspondents that did the
 same in all the other Countries where they are now found; not only expo-
 sing them to publick Sale as Books of ancient Date and venerable Antiqui-
 ty, but likewise slyly conveying an infinite number of written and printed
 Copies of the same into all Libraries, both publick and private, unknown
 to the Keepers and Owners thereof; And it may be that all these things
 were done so *secretly*, that none of the Confederacy did ever confess, nor
 any besides ever discover the Cheat; and it may be that all the rest of the
 World was so much asleep at that time, as to have no Suspicion of what
 was done; nor any Sense of that great Alteration that had been made in
 the World by these Books; nor any Remembrance, afterwards, when they
 awoke and found themselves Christians, that they had been of some other
 Religion before, when they were first taken with that *Lethargick Fit*.

But if these things *may be*, what is there of this kind that *may not be*?
 If the World be so much mistaken in this Matter, it may be as much mista-
 ken in any other Matter of the like Nature. And then, it may be, that
 there never was such a Man as *Homer*, or *Virgil*, or *Cesar*, or *Cicero*, or
Plutarch, or any other of those Persons, as whose Writings we now re-
 ceive the Books that go under their Names; but that all the Books pretend-
 ed to be written by those Authors, and likewise all the Books of later Date,
 whereby the Authority of those former Books is attested, were in like
 Manner contrived, and made and dispersed, by such another Gang of crafty
 and designing Knaves, who took Pleasure in abusing the rest of the World,
 or hoped to make a Gain to themselves thereby.

Nay then (for why should we stop here?) It may be, that not only the
 Laws of our Religion, but the Laws of our Civil State too, are all *forged*
 and *counterfeit*; It may be, that once upon a time, The Keeper of the Pub-
 lick Records, having by much and long Observation attained to good Skill
 in the ancient Ways of Writing for many Ages backward, and being a
 compleat Master of his Pen, and having also gotten an Art to make a fresh
 Writing seem just as old as he had a Mind it should be thought to be, did
 compose, and depose in their proper Places, those Original Acts of Par-
 liament which are now taken to be the Laws of some of our former Kings;
 and that to confirm and establish his Fraud, he procured some other Per-
 sons at the same time to Write or Print, and to convey into all Shops and
 Libraries, several Books of Reports and Pleadings, wherein these counter-
 feit Acts were cited and referred to; and it may be that while as this was
 doing, none else had their Eyes open to see it, nor had ever after the least
 Suspicion of what was done; or if they had, yet that they were so well
 pleased with the Cheat (which they thought would be good Means of pre-
 serve Peace and Justice in the Nation) as to be willing it should pass to
 Posterity

Posterity undiscovered. These *May be's* are I am sure every whit as possible and as likely as the other.

Either therefore let those Men who upon this Account doubt of the Authority of the Books of the *New Testament*; or who would make other doubt of it, only by suggesting that it is a thing possible in Nature, that they *may be* all forged and counterfeit (let them, I say, either) entertain and suggest the same doubt concerning all other ancient Books, of the Antiquity and Authority of which there is not greater Evidence than there is of these. And then they will render themselves so justly ridiculous to the World that there will be no need to expose their Folly; for then they must call in question the Authority of all Books and the Truth of all History: Or else let them fairly own that the true Reason of their making a Doubt concerning these Books, rather than concerning others, is because they do not resist the Matter of them; because they find it easier to resist that strong Evidence that is given of the Authority of these Books than they do to govern their Lives according to those strict Rules of Holiness and Purity that are therein prescribed, and to bring their Wills to the Obedience of Faith. And if they will but own this (which I believe is the Truth) their Prejudice and Partiality will be so evident to all, that it may be reasonably hoped their impious Suggestions will do but little Harm in the World, and that few Men of any Sense or Reason will be so fool-hardy as to venture their Souls, and run the Hazard of a miserable Eternity, upon so many, and such very improbable (I had almost said, such impossible) *may be's* as must be supposed to have been, if indeed these Books are forged and counterfeit; if indeed they were not written by those Persons whom they are commonly ascribed to.

But yielding this Point (may the Atheist or Infidel farther say) that the Gospel called St. Matthew's was written by St. Matthew, and that of St. Mark by St. Mark, and the rest of the Books which are ascribed to any other certain Authors, by those Persons to whom they are severally ascribed; yet the Authority of the whole *New Testament* will not, by this Concession, be sufficiently establish'd. For of some Books of the *New Testament* the Authors are not known, of others they are doubted; some Parts of this Book that are now received have been rejected in ancient Times and others not universally received. And besides, 'tis certain that in the early Times of Christianity there were severally Counterfeit Gospels and Epistles, some of which may possibly have slipped into the Canon unawares. And lastly, If it be granted that all the Books of the *New Testament* were originally written by the Apostles or other inspired Men, yet however the Books that we now have are but Copies, in which many Alterations may have been made by designing Men, or careless Transcribers.

These Objections (or Cavils rather, for such I am sure they would be accounted in any other Case) against the Authority of these Sacred Books have been urged by some Men both anciently and lately; but they have been also so well and fully answer'd by those learned Persons that have written in Defence of the Canon, that I once thought to have taken no notice of them.

them, and I believe had not done so, but that I consider'd on the other hand, that when an old Objection that has been answered an Hundred times is urged afresh, a great many may take it for a new one, and if it be not quickly answer'd, may be apt to think it unanswerable; so that in this Case, it may be better to repeat the same Answer (if it be a good one) that has been often formerly made to it, than to say nothing. And besides, in this degenerate Age, in which any wild or Archeistical Discourse passes for Wit, it may be the Hap of some Persons, who have not much mind or leisure or opportunity to read Books, to hear these things in Conversation, and not knowing readily what Answers to make to them, to be somewhat staggered in their Belief thereby; especially if they be such whose loose and licentious Way of Living makes them easie to receive, without Examination any Notions that may give them Ease or Encouragement in Sin.

For these Reasons therefore I thought it would not be amiss (especially because it is a Matter properly belonging to the Subject I am now upon, and because I have some time left for it) to mention, as briefly as may be, the Answers that have been usually given to these Objections.

And, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that of some of the Books of the *New Testament* the Authors Names are not certainly known (as namely of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*) and that of others, the Authors have been doubted (particularly of the *second and third Epistles of St. John*.) To this it hath been answered,

1. That the Credit and Authority of a Book depends many times much more upon the good Assurance that we have of the time when it was written, and of the Character of the Person that wrote it, than upon the certain Knowledge of his Name. It is therefore a Matter of no great Consequence whether the *Epistle to the Hebrews* was written by *St. Paul* himself (as is commonly, and upon very probable Grounds, believed;) Or (as some have conjectured) by *St. Luke* his constant Companion; or (as others) by *St. Clement* his Fellow labourer, whose Name was in the Book of Life, Phil. iv. 3. or (as others) by *St. Barnabas* his Assistant in Preaching the Gospel, and who is dignified by *St. Luke* with the Title of an *Apostle*, *Acts* xiv. 14. And so, neither is it very material whether the *Epistles* called the *second and third Epistles of St. John*, and commonly believed to be written by the same Person that wrote the first, were indeed written by *St. John* the *Apostle and Evangelist*, or (as some have thought) by another *John*, who was made Bishop of the *Jewish Christians* at *Ephesus*, by him; for it is sufficient that the Writers of these Books (which soever they were of the persons before-mentioned) were of good Ability and Integrity, and well instructed in that Doctrine and Religion, which they wrote about; and of this, besides the Testimony of the Ancients, there is good evidence enough in the Writings themselves.

2. In Answer to this, and to all other Objections of this sort, against these, or any other Books, or Chapters, or Paragraphs of the *New Testament*, it hath been farther truly said, that there is nothing singular in these Books, that there is no Doctrine of Christianity taught in any Part of the

the New Testament of the Author or Authority of which there hath ever been any Doubt in the Church; which is not taught in some other undoubted and uncontroversed Part of the same same Book. So that if it were granted that those Parts of the New Testament, of which there has been formerly any Doubt were still of uncertain Authority, our Christianity would suffer no real Loss thereby; only giving up these controverted Places we should sometimes want a good help to enable us to understand readily those other uncontroversed Places of the New Testament, wherein the same Doctrines are (but perhaps more briefly or obscurely) delivered.

2. Whereas 'tis said that *some* Parts of the *New Testament* have been rejected in ancient Times; this is granted. But then it hath been shewn that, considering by *whom* they have been rejected, and under what Notion and for what Reasons they were rejected, this Objection is of no Force to invalidate the Authority even of those *Parts* of the *New Testament* which have been so rejected, and much less of the rest of the Book which has been allowed by all.

Thus, *some Portions* of the *New Testament* have been rejected by *Hereticks*, because they contradicted their private and singular Notions; some by *Judaizing Christians*, as the two first Chapters of *St. Matthew*, because they were not found in that *Hebrew Copy* of that Gospel which they used and all the *Epistles* of *St. Paul* were likewise rejected by the same Persons but not, as not written by *St. Paul*, but only because they were written by him, whom they looked upon as an Enemy to their Nation, because he levelled them with other Nations, and as too averse to that Religion which had been introduced by *Moses*, which they continued so wedded to, even after their embracing Christianity, that they could not but suspect him to be a *false Apostle* who had so plainly taught the Abrogation thereof. And for the like Reasons *some other Parts* of the *New Testament* have been likewise rejected by some few Men; that is, not because they wanted the same Attestation which the other Parts of it had, or because it appear'd by credible History that they were *Spurious*, but only because they contradicted too plainly some Notions which their former Prejudices or Education had made them fond of. So that this Argument against the Authority of the *New Testament*, taken from the Rejection of some *Parts* of it, by some particular Men or Sects, is manifestly of no strength, unless there was some good Reason for their Rejecting them; and that there was good Reason for it, has not yet been shewn, but the contrary has been shewn very plainly by the ancient Writers of the Church, in several Books, written by them in Confutation of those Sects and Heresies which are still extant.

And 3. Whereas it is further said, that some Books which are now received as *Parts* of the *New Testament*, were not universally received in the most early Times, when their Authority (if they were authentick) might have been asserted upon more certain Grounds than it can be now; viz. the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the *Epistle* of *St. James*, the *2d* of *St. Peter*, the *2d* and *3d* of *St. John*, the *Epistle* of *St. Jude*, and the *Book* of the *Revelation*; This is likewise granted. But in Answer to it, it is said;

1. That there is good Evidence from Antiquity, that these *controverted Books* were received in the most early Times, by those who had the best Opportunity of satisfying themselves of the *Authors* and *Authority* thereof, *viz.* by those to whom they were sent, and in general by the whole *Greek Church*.
2. That it is no wonder that these Books (being *writtene* either to Christians dispersed, and consequently only publish'd by giving out Copies thereof to some, to be communicated, as there was Opportunity, to others; or else to private Persons, living perhaps at great distance from the Places from which they were sent) were not so easie to be attested, and upon that account were not at first so generally receiv'd, as the others were, which were either *written* to particular Churches, to which the *Authors* Hands, and the Messengers that brought them were well known, or which were first publish'd and receiv'd in the same Places where they were *written*. And,
3. That even those Churches which did for some time *doubt* of the *Authority* of these Books, were persuaded at last to receive them as the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles*, or other Inspired Men. If therefore it be supposed, that while they doubted of these Books, they had *Reason* for their Doubt; that is, that they did it, because they were not as yet fully satisfied that they were Apostolical Writings, (which the Objectors, I believe, will readily enough grant) it may be very reasonably presumed, that they had afterwards greater Reason to lay aside their Doubt; and that when they did receive them, it was, because there had been then lately such Evidence and Attestation given of their being *written* by the *Apostles* or other Inspired Men as they had not heard of before, such as they could not then, with any Reason, contradict or gainsay; for ordinarily a less Reason will persuade a Man to take up an Opinion at first, than will persuade him to go back from an Opinion (how weakly soever grounded) which he has before embraced and defended. So that this Objection is so far from lessening, that it rather strengthens the Proof we have of the Authority even of these once *controverted Books*; And it is, besides, a very good corroborating Evidence of the *Authority* of all the other Books of the New Testament. For the Backwardness of some Churches to receive these *controverted Books* at first (when they had nothing to object to the *Matter* of them) makes it evident that the Christians of the first Ages were not so very easie and credulous as some have represented them; that they did not so very greedily swallow any Book for divine Revelation that contained a great many Miracles, mixed with a few good Morals, without making due Enquiry concerning the *Author* and *Authority* thereof. But on the contrary, their being so hard to be persuaded to receive these *controverted Books* for some time, while they wanted, as they thought, sufficient Attestation (altho' the Doctrine of them was in all Points agreeable to the Doctrine of the other Books which they had before received; their being so hard, I say, to receive these Books) of the Authority of which there nevertheless really was such Evidence, as they themselves, after having well weigh'd and consider'd it, declared themselves satisfied with, gives

very

very good ground to believe, that they had from the beginning such Evidence as was without Exception of the Authority of all those other Books (that is) of much the greatest Part) of the New Testament, which were never controverted, which were from the first, and with universal consent receiv'd by all Christian Churches; for if there had not been very undeniable Evidence of their being the genuine Writings of the Apostles, or other Inspired Men, there would certainly have been the same Doubt and Controversie concerning them, that there once was concerning these.

But, 4. It hath been further objected, that in the early Times of Christianity, there were several counterfeit Gospels and Epistles, which passed among some for the Writings of the Apostles; and that 'tis possible some of them may have slipped into the Canon, unaware to the first Christians who, by all the Accounts of those Times, were more remarkable for their Honesty and Simplicity and Zeal, than for their extraordinary Parts and Learning.

But this Objection (granting the Matter of Fact alledg'd in it to be true) is so far from lessening, that it rather adds to that reasonable Assurance that we have, that all the Books of the Canon are true and genuine. For there is nothing so apt to put Men upon using Caution, as a great Probability of being cheated if they be not cautious. Thus, when the Coin is generally good, and there is very little base or counterfeit Money stirring, Men commonly take it by Tale, without examining the Weight and Purities of every Piece; and so may more easily have a single Piece of lighter Weight or baser Metal put upon them without discerning it: But if the Coin be much corrupted, they look more narrowly upon every single Piece of Money that they take, and if there be the least cause to suspect it, make Trial of it by the Scale or Touchstone, before they accept it as good. If there were in the early Times of Christianity, many counterfeit Pieces given out, and perhaps receiv'd by some, as written by the Apostles, and which were, some of them, discovered to be spurious; (and there is no greater Evidence from Antiquity, that there were any such spurious Writings, than there is that the Spuriousness of some of them was soon discovered;) this could not but put the Christians of those Times upon examining more strictly, what Evidence and Attestation there was that those other Books were true and genuine which had been generally received as such. So that the more there were of these spurious and counterfeit Books, so much the more assured and confident we may reasonably be, that none but such as were undoubtedly true and authentick and very well attested, were admitted into the Canon; And of the two, it is much more probable, that they did, for want of clear Attestation, refuse to admit some that had been written by the Apostles, than that they did, without sufficient Attestation, admit any that were not.

And that the Christians of those early Times (who had the best means and opportunities of satisfying themselves whether any Book, given out as written by an Apostle, was so or not) wanted not skill to discern between a true and a spurious Writing; (as is maliciously suggested by some Men) is abundantly evident, from those Monuments of the excellent Parts and Learning

of some of the first Converts to Christianity, which are still extant in their Books; and from the Testimony that is therein given to the like good Ability of several others, who were famous in their Generation, for their Preaching and Writings, and for their stoutly maintaining the truths of Christianity both against Infidels and Hereticks, but whose Books are now unhappily lost,

But 5. and lastly; It was further said, That tho' it be granted that all the Books of the New Testament that are now received, were originally written by the Apostles or other inspired Men, yet those which we now have are but Copies; in which, by so many Transcriptions thereof as must have been in about 1400 years, many alterations may have happen'd, thro' the Ignorance, or Oversight, or wilful Defile of the Transcribers; And that several Changes have been made, is undeniably plain, but the various Readings that have been observed in comparing the best Manuscript Copies, that are now, or have been extant since Printing began; So that we cannot be sure whether any particular Passages once found in those Books, are the very words of an Apostle, or of some ignorant or careless Scribe. But to this it hath been answered;

1. That so far as this Objection is of any Force, it invalidates the Credit of all History, and of all other Books of ancient Date, as well as of the New Testament; nay, indeed of all other Books, much more than of this; for the faithfully Transcribing whereof, it may reasonably be presumed, there was formerly, greater Care taken, (as there now for the Correctly Printing it) than there ordinarily was of other Books that were of less Consequence.

2. That tho' it be certain that some Hereticks have attempted to corrupt the Text of the New Testament in some Places, and have made Changes in some few Copies thereof; it is almost as certain that their Attempts of this kind neither have nor ever could amount to a Corruption of all the Copies thereof that were generally in Mens hands; In which there is even to this day an admirable Agreement in all matters of moment. And from that general Agreement that always was in all the Copies of this Book, (except those few that were sometimes corrupted by Hereticks, to serve to turn) their Attempts of this kind have been always rendred successless; and those false Doctrines, that were justified only by their own false Copies of this Book, solidly confuted.

3. It is further answered, that not only there is no Evidence that there has been, but that 'tis morally impossible that there should be a general Depravation of the Copies of this Book, either designedly, or by chance, in any place of great Consequence either in Point of History or Doctrine. For when was it possible that this Corruption should be? Was it in the Copies that were given out, in the Days of the Apostles, and while they were living? This can't well be supposed; Or if it had been done then, it can't be thought but that the Authors of these Books, being living, would have taken care to have had such false Copies of their Books suppressed, or well corrected; or at least have given publick Notice, in or-

der to their Correction, of those Faults that had been committed in the transcribing. which did either obscure or spoil their Sense.

Was it then in the times immediately after the Apostles were dead? Neither could this be; for by this time an infinite Number of true Copies had been made and dispersed in all Parts of the Christian Church. And besides the Autographs of the Books themselves were then probably, all in Being; For *Tertullian* who liv'd in the third Century, witnesses that some of them were extant and to be seen even in his time; So that by comparing of the new false Copies with the ancient true ones, or with the Originals themselves then extant, the Fraud would have been quickly discovered, or the Mistake easily rectified.

Was it then in the times after this, when the Originals were lost or worn out? This was still less possible; For by this time not only a greater Number of true Copies thereof, in the Original Greek, were dispersed and in the Hands of all Christians; but several Translations thereof had been likewise made into other Languages, several Commentaries had been written thereupon, and the most material Passages thereof had been occasionally, cited by the Christian Writers of those or the foregoing times.

And the further we go on downwards, 'twas still (for such Reasons as have been given already) more impossible that the Copies of this Book should be generally corrupted in any Place or Matter of Moment; as well as more likely that there should be every Day an Increase of such small and literal Mistakes, as could hardly be avoided by the greatest Care and Faithfulness. And these are the various Readings before spoken of. Concerning which, and in answer to the before-mention'd Objection, so far as it is grounded upon them, it is farther said.

4. In the fourth Place; That they are no other than such as are to be met with in Comparing the Manuscripts of all other Books; That these various Readings (if they be compared together with Judgment) are more like to hear us understand the true meaning of the Writers, than to endanger our mistaking their Sense; it being very probable that when there are several Readings, one of them is the right, and easier by their Help, to rectifie the Mistakes that may have been made in some Copies, than it would have been, if all Copies had agreed in the same mistake. And lastly, that it is, hardly in any Place of which there are such various Readings, very material which is the true Reading; there being no point that is of the Subdance either of the History or Doctrine of Christianity, that is grounded upon any Text, of which there are, in different Copies, various Readings, but which may be proved by some other Texts, in the Reading whereof all Copies do agree.

5. And Lastly, In answer to this Objection, that the Text of the New Testament is depraved and corrupted, and consequently of uncertain Authority, it is further said; That supposing these Books to be written by the Apostles, and by divine Direction and Inspiration, which must be supposed, or at least for Argument sake, be allow'd by those that make this Objection; or else the Objection is trifling) it is by no means credible that the same Goodness of God which took Care for the writing, has not likewise taken care for the preserving of these Books so free (at least

Corruption, that they may be sufficient to answer the ends for which they were written; that is, fully to instruct Men in all points of Christian Faith and Practice, to make them wise unto Salvation, and thoroughly furnish them unto all good Works.

And now from all that hath been said I hope it appears, that we have sufficient Reason to believe that the Books of the New Testament were written by those Persons whose Names they bear, or to whom they are ascribed, viz. by the Apostles of Christ, or other inspired Men; Which is the first thing I was to make good.

Whether there be sufficient Reason to give them Credit in the Matters of Fact which they have related; and whether the Doctrine of the Gospel well proved by the History of it, shall (God willing) be hereafter entered.

In the mean time (supposing their Testimony to be credible) what has been said upon this first Head may serve to shew, in some measure, the reasonableness of those Men, who are not satisfied with the Scripture Revelation.

For I believe there are few that have heard any thing of the manner of the first Preaching of the Gospel, but who think, that they that liv'd in those times, and heard the Apostles themselves, had sufficient Reason to receive their Testimony: And this (perhaps they'll say) is what they could wish for themselves, viz. That they might have heard the Apostles themselves, or that they might now have as good and sure Grounds of Faith as those had who were converted to Christianity by the Preaching of the Apostles; which if they had, they make no doubt but they should be not only almost, but altogether such, as the Primitive Christians were, both in Belief and Practice.

But if they are not such now, 'tis much to be doubted whether they could have been such, if they had lived then. For by what has been now said it appears, that the Books of the new Testament being (as we have very good Reason to believe they were) written by the Apostles themselves, are their Words; their Sermons; that therein the Apostles themselves being dead, do yet truly speak to us, the very same things, tho' not just in the same manner, that they spake before while they were living; and that their Testimony written, if indeed it be theirs, (which I have shewn there is no cause to doubt of) is as credible as their living Testimony was.

For in matters of common Testimony we make little Difference between Speech and Writing; If a Man whom we dare trust sends us a Letter, and therein relates such and such things, as heard or seen by himself, or as well attested to him by unexceptionable Witnesses, we give as full Credit to his Letter as we should do to his Words.

So that in truth, our Case, who live now, is not very different from theirs who lived in the Apostles Days, and heard them saying those same things, which we now read in their Books; and if we think those inexcusable who did not receive their Testimony when given by word of Mouth, we can't in good Reason, hold our selves excused, if we receive not the same Testimony of the same Persons given under their Hands.

In one respect indeed, it must be granted, that they had the Advantage : viz. because they might be surer that they heard an Apostle speak than the Nature of the thing will admit we should be, that we read the Words of an Apostle, written; But we are sure enough of this: We have as good moral Certainty of it, as we can have of any thing, that is not capable of any other than a moral Certainty: And if the Words that we read in the New Testament are the Words of the Apostles of Christ, we have in some respects, the advantage of those who liv'd in those early times; for we have the concurrent Testimony of several of the Apostles written; whereas hardly any in those times, (when a few Persons were to bear witness to all the World) could have more than the Testimony of one single Apostle only, by word of Mouth; and many Witnesses are more credible than one: And besides, there being several Witnesses their Testimony of it be false, may be more easily proved so by their Disagreement with one another, than the Testimony of one single Witness could be; And lastly, a Writing which we may review and read over as often as we will, and which we may take what time we please to consider of, may be more thoroughly understood, and better digested, than a Sermon or Discourse only once spoken can well be.

But if it be granted that the Faith of the first Converts to Christianity which came by hearing of the Apostles, might be built upon more certain and infallible Grounds, than ours, that comes only by Reading, it (And some Reasons may perhaps be given hereafter, why 'twas fit it should be so) it is enough, however, to render our Infidelity inexcusable, if the Grounds of Faith that we now have, are very rational, if they are a sufficient Support for such a Faith as will enable us to please God and to overcome the World.

And this may be farther said for our Comfort, and to make us easily satisfied with those Grounds and Reasons of Faith which are afforded to us by the written Testimony of the Apostles in the Books of the New Testament; that as there is more Certainty in that Belief, (if it may be called Belief) which is grounded upon Demonstration, or infallible Evidence so there is more Praise and Vertue in that good Disposition of Mind, which makes us rest satisfied with such Grounds of Faith, as tho' not absolutely and infallibly certain, yet cannot, with any good Reason, be denied or excepted against; According to that Saying of our Saviour to St. Thomas in a like Case, with which I shall conclude; *John 20. 29. Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they (that is, they are more blessed, their Faith is more excellent and praise-worthy, and so will intitle them to a greater Reward) who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

Which Blessedness, that we may all attain, God of his great Mercy and Goodness grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.

FINIS.

The Sufficiency of the Scripture Revelation,
As to the Proof of it: Part II.

THE
 FOURTH SERMON.

St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets;
 let them bear them :*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : But if one went unto
 them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they bear not Moses and the Prophets,
 neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead.*

THE Point I entred upon the Proof of the last time was this,
 (3.) That we have sufficient Reason given us to convince us
 of the Truth and Authority of the Holy Scripture, and conse-
 quently of all the Doctrines that are taught by it.

And for the Proof of this, having, for Brevity sake, confined my Dis-
 course upon it to the Books of the New Testament only, (the rather be-
 cause the Authority of that being granted, the Authority of the Old Te-
 stament cannot reasonably be questioned) I propounded to shew, 1. That
 we have sufficient Reason to believe that the Books of the New Testament
 were written by those Persons who are said to be the Authors thereof. 2.
 That there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to them in their Relations
 of those matters of Fact which they have recorded. And 3. That if the
 matters of Fact related in the New Testament are true, they are sufficient
 proofs of the Truth and Divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are
 therein taught.

And I hope enough was said the last time, to shew that we have suffi-
 cient Reason to believe that the Books of the New Testament were writ-
 ten by those Persons who are said to be the Authors thereof. What I am
 next to do, is,

2. To shew that there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to these Authors in their Relations of those matters of Fact which they have recorded

And I hope none of you that hear me (whom I presume to be all Christians) will take Offence at it, if now, while I am arguing this Point, I sometimes speak of the Holy Evangelists with the same Freedom that might be used in speaking concerning any other Authors, and if I sometimes plead for no more Credit to be given to them in their Relations than is fit and reasonable to be given to any other Historian that was naturally as well furnished and qualified to write a true History as they were, and whose Fidelity and Veracity is as well attested and confirmed other ways as theirs was. For you will consider, I hope, that my Business is now with Infidels, with whom we can argue only upon the Principles of common Reason: And tho' we who are Christians already, do believe, as one of the first Principles of our Religion, that these Sacred Writers were Divinely and supernaturally assisted in their Work, and that upon that account they deserve much greater Credit in what they have written than other Historians do; yet this is what those who are yet Infidels, will not allow; and in Disputation nothing is to be presumed on one side but what will be readily allowed by the other Party. So that the Divine Inspiration of the Evangelical Writers and the supernatural Assistance which we believe they had in their Writing cannot as yet be regularly insisted upon as an Argument to gain them Credit; But it is what will easily be granted afterwards, when the Truth of their History shall be well established upon other Grounds; (as I hope it will be in the following Discourse) and 'tis what may then serve to procure a Religious Respect and Reverence to these Sacred Writings, and to engage us to receive them *not as the Word of Men, but (as they are in Truth) as the Word of God.* 1 T^{hess}. 2. 13.

But this one thing nevertheless I suppose I may presume, *viz.* that the Books of the New Testament (the Historical Parts of it in particular) were written by those Authors to whom they are ascribed (which has been already proved) the matters of Fact recorded by the Evangelists in Writing are the same which they and the other Apostles testified by Word of Mouth in their Preaching; For it cannot, I think, with any Reason be suspected that their Preaching and Writings were disagreeable to each other, because such Disagreement would, most certainly, have utterly destroyed the Credit of them both.

And this being supposed, I hope, it will clearly appear that there is abundantly sufficient Reason to give full Credit to these Writings, if the following things be considered; (1.) If we consider the Nature Conditions and Circumstances of the Matters that are recorded in the Historical Books of the New Testament, and of the History itself, (2.) If we consider the good Capacity that the Authors thereof were in, to know the truth of the things they have related. (3.) If we consider the strong Obligations they were under to write nothing but the Truth, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information. (4.) If we consider the good Evidences that we have of their Honesty and Faithfulness.

And (5.) Lastly, If we consider the Confirmation that was given to the Truth of their History by God himself.

3. I say the Evangelical History will appear to be highly credible, if without any regard as yet had to the Ability and Integrity of its Authors) we only consider the Nature, Conditions and Circumstances of the matters therein recorded and of the History it self, Concerning which there are two things especially that may be observed, 1. That the matters recorded by the Evangelical Writers are such as might be certainly known. and 2. That they are such, and in such manner related by the Evangelists, that if their History of them had been false, it could never have gained Credit in the World.

1. First, I say the matters recorded by the Evangelical Writers are such as might be certainly known ; I mean, either by the Historians themselves, or by those from whom they had their Information. For,

1. They, are, for the most part, plain matters of Sense, which those who were present at them could have no doubt of without distrusting their own Faculties of hearing or seeing ; and which those who testified them might be as certain of the Truth of, as we can be of any thing that we hear with our own Ears, or see with our own Eyes. For, thus ; whether our Saviour gave out himself to be the Messias foretold by the Prophets ; whether he said that he was the Son of God ; and whether he uttered those other Speeches which the Evangelists have recorded as spoken by him, could not but be certainly known by the People who often heard him ; and especially by his Apostles who constantly attended him.

And so likewise whether he did those many Wonderful Works which the Evangelists have recorded of him could not but be known by those that were present with him ; they might be certain either that he did them, or that he did not do them. Thus for instance, it might be certainly known to those that first affirmed that he gave sight to the Blind, whether those Persons had been once Blind, and whether afterwards they saw ; and to those that witnessed that he gave Strength to the Cripples, whether the Men whom they said he wrought this Cure upon, had been lame or disabled in their Feet, Hands, or Body before, and whether afterwards they walked and had Strength like other Men ; and to those that testified that he raised the Dead, whether the Persons said to have been raised by him, had been truly dead, and whether afterwards they lived.

But above all, his own Resurrection (which the present Season as well as the Wonderfulness and Importance of the thing obliges us to have a special regard to) was a thing that might be most certainly known to those that pretended to be Witnesses of it ; [*This Sermon was Preached on the Sunday in Easter Week,.*] they might be certain whether he had been dead, and whether he showed himself alive after his Passion by manifest and infallible Proofs, and was seen of them forty Days. Of this they might be rather more certain than of any other of his Miracles, because it was a thing not to be judged of by one sense only (as some of the rest) but by almost all their Senses ; for by their Sight they might be

assured that it was he himself whom for more than three Years before they had been well acquainted with whom they then saw with their Eyes and by their Hearing, that it was his own Voice, and not a Stranger's that spake to them; and which they well knew, that the same Body which they saw and heard, and not an airy Apparition; not a meer Voice: and all that it was that very same Body, which they had seen before hanging upon the Cross, and which they had taken down dead from the Cross, when they were permitted) as they say they were) *to handle and feel him, to put their Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and to thrust their Hands into the Gash that had been made in his Side by the Spear that pierced his Heart* Luke 24. 39. Joh. 20. 27.

And of the *other Matters* recorded by the *Evangelists*, but not as *Matters* of their own Knowledge, *those* from whom they had their Information might have the *same Certainty* which they had of these things. For his *Master* could not but know whether she had conceiv'd him without Knowledge of a Man; and whether his Birth had been foretold her by an Angel. And she, and her Relations, and the whole Neighbourhood might have certain Knowledge of the Time, Place, and all other Circumstances of his Birth as they are related in the Gospels.

They that testified such plain *Matters* of Sense as most of those which are recorded in the Evangelical History, could not but know either that the things which they testified were true, or that they themselves were egregious Liars when they testified them to have been so.

2. As the *Matters* recorded in the Evangelical History are chiefly *Matters* of sense; of which, as such, the greatest Certainty and Assurance may be had; and in which any single Witness thereof may be very confident that he is not mistaken; so it may be also observ'd, that most of them are related as *Matters* done in the sight, hearing, or presence of a great number of Witnesses, which Circumstance adds very much to that Certainty which any single Witness of such *Matters* may receive by his own Senses only.

For tho' it be a common Saying, that *Seeing is Believing*, and we commonly desire no greater assurance of the Truth of any *Matter of Sense*, than our own Sense and Perception of it; it is nevertheless no unusual thing for a Man when he is relating somewhat that happen'd that was very extraordinary and surprizing, to say, that tho' he saw it himself, he could hardly believe his own eyes. And this might well enough have been the Case of one of the Witnesses of any of our Lord's Miracles (and especially of his Resurrection, the most wonderful of all his Miracles, and which gave Confirmation to all the rest;) for tho' they were plain *Matters of Sense*, yet they were withal so very strange and astonishing, that if any Man had seen them at first he might probably have had some distrust even of his own Senses, or he might afterwards have been ready to doubt whether he had been well awake, or in a Dream. But a Man cannot so reasonably suspect that his own Senses deceive him, when he perceives that the thing appears to all others that are present, just as it does to him; nor can he afterwards, so easily fancy

was in a Dream, when he finds that all the rest that were there have the same Notion and Remembrance of the Thing that he himself has. So that by this Additional Evidence, I mean by the Agreement that a Man finds there is between his own Senses and other Mens, he becomes *more certain and confident* of the Truth of the Things he sees, than he would have been by his own Eye-sight only.

2. *Secondly*, The other Thing which I said might be noted concerning the *Matters* recorded in the Evangelical History, is, That they are such, and in such manner related by the Evangelists; that if their History of them had been false, it could never have gain'd *Credit* in the World.

And this may in part appear from what has been said already; For as there is nothing that can be more certainly known and attested than a plain Matter of Sense at which several are present; so there is nothing more able to be contradicted and easie to be disproved than *such a Matter* is, in case it was not so done as 'tis reported to have been.

But there are several other things that are here proper to be consider'd;

1. It may be consider'd that the Gospel History comprehends a very great number of Relations of such *Matters* of Fact and Sense; considering therefore how very easie it was to disprove every one of them if it had been false; 'tis, most evidently, morally impossible that a History stuffed with nothing else but Lyes and Forgeries of this sort (as they must suppose the Evangelical History to be, who will not allow it to be a true History) should ever have obtain'd any Credit. And most of the things recorded by the Evangelists, being related by them as *Matters* of their own Knowledge; if the Falsity of only one single Relation had been made appear, the Credit of the whole History would have been thereby *destroy'd*.

2. It may be also consider'd that all these things are related in the Gospel History as done in that *same Country* in which the History thereof was first publish'd; and that a Country but of *small Extent*, not above Two hundred Miles in length at the most, and not half so much in breadth; and yet not all in the same part of it, but some in *one* place, some in *another*; and those usually in the most considerable Towns or Cities of *Judea* and *Galilee*. And by this, their History of these Things, if it had been false, was still more easie and liable to be disproved; there being very few of those to whom *False Matters* were first related that needed to have gone many Miles from home to have enquir'd into the Truth of some or other of them. And if any Man had found the *Apostles* false in their Report of any *Matter* that was said to have been done in his own Neighbourhood, he would hardly have gone any farther for more satisfaction; he would readily have concluded without further Examination, that being found *False Witnesses* in one thing, they were not fit to be believ'd in any thing.

3. It may be moreover consider'd, that the Gospel History was written and publish'd in a *few years* after the things therein Recorded are said to be done. It is not certain indeed in what Year precisely the Gospels were written; But they are but allowed to be the genuine Writings of the reputed Authors; which I hope has been already sufficiently prov'd) 'tis certain they were all

(even the latest of them, that of *St. John*) written before the Memory of the Things therein recorded could be worn out; nay, if we further suppose (as I think we may do very reasonably) that the Things recorded by the *Evangelists* are the same which they and the other *Apostles* and Disciples of our Lord testified by word of mouth in their Preaching, we may truly enough say that the *History of the Gospel* was begun to be publish'd on the same Day on which the Apostles began to preach, viz. on the *Day of Pentecost*, ten Days after our Lord's Ascension; and that it was fully publish'd in a very short time after. So that most of the things recorded in the *Gospels* are things that had been done or had happen'd in the compass of less than four Years before the History thereof was first publish'd, for it was not so long from our Lord's *Baptism* to his *Ascension*; and the earliest Things of all that are therein recorded (which are but few, and make but a small part of the History) viz. the Birth of *St. John Baptist*, and of our Lord, and the Things that happen'd about that Time, were Things done not above Thirty five Years before at the most.

And the *History of the Acts of the Apostles* (which because it ends with *St. Paul's* Imprisonment at *Rome*, we may reasonably think was publish'd about that Time) comprehends a History of some very remarkable Things, the very first and earliest whereof had not been done Thirty Years before.

And this Consideration affords another very probable Argument of the Truth of the *Evangelical History*; because by this it still further appears how very easie it would have been to have disprov'd it, if it had been false, for it being an History of Things done so very lately, it must needs be that several of those into whose Hands it first came, must have certain Knowledge whether some of the things therein related had been so or not; and they who had not this Knowledge, might easily have had certain Information (from others, I mean, besides the Apostles and Disciples of our Lord) whether the Relations therein contain'd were true or false. — Especially if it be considered further, in the 4th Place.

4. That the Facts related in the *Evangelical History* are commonly related with all the Circumstances that were needful or proper to be noted in order to the rendering an Enquiry into the truth of them exceeding easy to such as had any distrust thereof. For in the Account which the *Evangelists* give us of our Saviour's Speeches, they commonly tell us not only his Words, but likewise when, where, to whom, and upon what Occasion they were spoken; and in the Account that they give of his Miracles, they usually note the Places where they were done, and very often the Names or Characters at least, of the Persons they were wrought upon; and sometimes they mention also who were by and Witnesses thereof, and what Discourse concerning him was thereby occasion'd; and in relating the Things that were done or happen'd before our Saviour's Baptism, about the Time of his Birth, they carefully note the Time, the Place, and other Circumstances, whereby their Readers were (as it were) challeng'd to make Enquiry, and desired not to take Things only upon their Credit; and were also directed readily whither to go, and to whom to apply themselves

obtain the fullest Satisfaction whether the Things they reported were so or not. And if all the Circumstances of every particular Story which they relate are not always so punctually set down, the Omission thereof sometimes is not of much Consideration, because it was so very easie by enquiring into the Truth of those many other Stories which are related with all Circumstances for any Person to be satisfied whether their History in general deserv'd Credit or nor; And whoever had found any one Story falsely reported by them, would hardly have troubled himself, (at least not for his own Satisfaction) to have examined further into the Truth of the rest.

5. It may be further consider'd that most of the Things recorded by the Evangelists are related by them as things that were done very publicly, as Things that were well known to a great many. For very few in Comparison of those Discourses of our Lord that are recorded by the Evangelists were address'd in private to his Apostles only, but most of them were spoken in publick; his set Sermons commonly to great multitudes gathered together on a Mountain, on the Sea-shore, or in a Synagogue; and the rest most commonly in Places of Resort, in populous Towns or Cities, in Jerusalem or the Temple, when many were by to hear what he said. And his Miracles were done for the most part in the best Inhabited Cities of Judea and Galilee; or if in other Places, yet in the open Day-light, and commonly when there was a great croud of People about him: Or if at any time the Miracle itself was done privately, in an House, or a Chamber, the Effect of the Miracle was usually very visible, and such as could not but be taken notice of by a great many. And even of those few Things which were spoken or done by him most privately, there was no want of Witnesses; there being (except very rarely) no fewer than twelve in constant Attendance upon him, and several others besides that Companioned with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them. Acts

2.1. And this Circumstance of the Facts recorded by the Evangelists, as it made them capable of better and more certain Attestation, being true; so it contributed no less towards the rendering it easie to disprove that Relation which they had given of them, if it had been false. For when a Man witnesses a thing of his own private Knowledge there may be no way to invalidate his Testimony, but either by shewing that the Thing which he testifies was not possible, or by offering some just Exception to the Credit of the Witnesses; But when neither of these can be done (and they cannot always be done altho' the Thing testified be false) yet in case the Matter was done publicly, it is the easiest thing in the World to convict a false Witness by the contrary Testimony of several others that were present and as capable of knowing the Truth of the Thing as himself; or by the Clashing of the Witnesses among themselves. Nothing therefore could have been more easie than to have disproved the Evangelical History in almost every particular of it, if it had not been true.

For most of our Saviour's Speeches and Miracles are related as spoken and done in the Presence not of his Disciples only, but of a great many others that happened to be by, by Chance, or that follow'd him, not for any Liking that they had to his Person or Doctrine, but only out of *Curiosity*, or for the sake of the *Novelty*; and very often they were done before such as came on purpose to watch what he said and did; with a Design to lay hold on any Occasion that was offer'd to represent him to the People as an *Impostor*. Can it be suppos'd then that these were ignorant whether the Relation which the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* gave of these Matters was true or false? Or can it be imagin'd that they would all have held their Peace? that not one, of those many that could have done it, would have open'd his Mouth to have convicted the *Apostles* of Falsity, if they had either in Word or Writing related any one of these things otherwise than it had indeed been transacted? And if in any one of these Things, of which the *Apostles* pretended they had personal Knowledge, they had been found *false Witnesses*, their Credit would have been ruin'd for ever.

Nay if they had been found false in their Report of any of those *other Matters* which they have left upon Record, of which they had not a personal Knowledge; tho' this indeed would not have been such a Proof of their Dishonesty (for any Man may very innocently be mis-inform'd) it would however have been such a plain Argument of their *foolish Credulity*, as would have destroy'd their Credit no less than if they had been found in a known Lye. For these also were Matters of the same *publick Nature*; nay indeed they were rather more *publick* than the other; they were so very publick that any Man with very small Trouble might have been fully satisfied whether they were so or not.

For thus, they tell us that our Lord was of the Seed of *David*; (and it was a Matter of the greatest Consequence to the Christian Religion that he should be known to be so;) How very easie was it at that time, when the *Genealogies* of all the Jewish *Families*, and of the Family of *David* more especially, were kept with the greatest Carefulness and Exactness for them to know this? and how very easie was it, for any one that doubted it, to have inspected the publick Registers, and seen whether it was so or not?

They tell us also several Circumstances of our Lord's Birth, (*Luke 2. 1, &c.*) and several Accidents that happen'd about that time; They tell us, for instance, that *Joseph* being of the House and Lineage of *David* was forced with *Mary* his Wife, at a very inconvenient time for her, being great with Child, to take a long Journey of about an Hundred Miles from *Nazareth* in *Galilee*, where their Habitation then was, to *Bethlehem* in *Judea*, the City of *David*, that so their Names might be enroled with the rest of the Family of *David*, when *Augustus Caesar* had order'd general Enrolment of the whole Jewish Nation; they tell us that then at there *Jesus* was born; (*Matth. 2. 1, &c.*) that at the time of his Birth certain Wise Men out of the East, conducted by a Star, came to *Judea* in Quest of the *Messias*; That they inform'd *Heron* of the Design of their coming

that they were directed by the Council of the Chief Priests and Scribes to
 look for him in *Bethlehem*; That *Herod* disappointed of the Design he had
 to kill this new-born King of the Jews, by their not returning back to him
 according to his Appointment, sent forth, and that he might make sure work
 he, *slew all the Children in Bethlehem that were under two years old*; and
 several things they tell us of the like kind, easie to be known if true, and
 less easie to be disproved if false; for whether there
 had been such a **Taxing* or Enrolment of the whole **Απογραφὴ*
of the Jews, according to their Families, by
 the Order of the Emperor, could not but be well known to all the Jews;
 and the People of *Nazareth* could not but know when *Joseph* went from
 thence, and whither he went, and upon what Occasion, and how long it
 was before he returned; and the People at *Jerusalem* could not but long
 remember the Story of the *Wise Men*, at whose coming *Herod* and the
 whole City with him was so much troubled; and if there had been no
 such thing, would readily have contradicted the Apostle's Relation of it;
 and the Mothers at *Bethlehem* which survived the Loss of their dear Chil-
 dren, could never after while they lived forget that general Mourning
 there had once been amongst them, nor the Occasion of it. If therefore
 these and such like things related by the *Evangelists*, as things publicly
 done, and much talked of, and of which (as they say) the Rumour was
 spread far and near, had not been so as they are related, their whole *Hi-*
story would have been thereby so much *disparaged*, that no part of it would
 ever have had much Credit.

'Tis true indeed there are some things related by the *Evangelists* that
 were not altogether so publick as those I have before mentioned, for there
 are some things, of which (according to the Account that is given of them
 in the *Evangelical History*) none but the Disciples of Christ were Witnesses;
 and in particular was the *Resurrection of our Lord*, which we at this time
 commemorate; and which is for that Reason most proper to be now in-
 stanced in. Of this then I say (as well as of some few other things) it
 must be granted, that it was a Fact that could directly be witnessed only
 by his own Friends, by his Apostles and Disciples; for so *St. Peter* ob-
 serves, speaking of this Matter, *Acts x. 40, 41.* Him God raised up the
 third Day, and shewed him openly, not to all the People, but to Wit-
 nesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him
 after he rose from the Dead. But nevertheless, considering how long,
 and how often, he is reported to have appeared to them, and the many
 Circumstances that are noted concerning his several Apparitions, and the
 great Number of those whom he is said to have appear'd to (for *St. Paul*
 affirms, that besides his frequent Apparitions to his Apostles, he was seen
 once by above five hundred Brethren, *1 Cor. 15. 6.*) their Testimony
 in this Matter, if it had been false, was very near as easie and liable to
 be disproved, as in any of the Matters before spoken of. For it is very
 hard for so much as two Men that are hired, or agree together to give in
 false Evidence, to be so well instructed in the Evidence they are to give,
 or

or to concert the Matter so well between themselves, but that upon separate Examination their Falsity may easily be detected by their Disagreement in some considerable Circumstances of the Matter they be Witnesses to; How very much easier then would it have been to have done this, in a Matter cloathed with such great variety of Circumstances, as that was testified by so many, by Twelve, by Seventy, by above five hundred Persons.

Or it it can be supposed, that they might have all so fully agreed beforehand, in what Manner and with what Circumstances to tell this Story that it might not be possible to catch them in a Contradiction; and yet the Thing it self was of that Nature, that the false Evidence they had given concerning it (if it had been false) might easily have been shewn other ways, for what they testified was, that *that same Jesus*, whom the Jews had Crucified, and whom they had seen laid into the Sepulchre was risen again, and had been seen alive three Days after his Passion by several of his Disciples; Had this therefore been false, how very easy would it have been for the Jews to have disproved their Evidence of it, only going to the Sepulchre, and taking out thence his dead Body, and exposing it for some to publick view? And thether doubtless they did go and with this Design; but the Body they could not find, and yet they had taken all the Caution that was possible to prevent its being convey'd away (Matth. 27. 62.) having obtain'd from Pilate a Guard of Soldiers on purpose to keep watch over it for three Days. This therefore is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of the Apostle's Testimony concerning our Lord's Resurrection, that it being such as might with the greatest Ease the World have been disproved if it had been false; the Jews had nothing to say against it, nothing to oppose to it, but only that very ill contrived that self-contradicting Evidence of the Watchmen; who said *that when they were asleep*, (Matth. 28. 13.) that is, when all their Senses were bound up; and when they were not in a Capacity of knowing any thing that was done, *the Disciples came and stole the Body away*. But if they had the Body remov'd (in which Case only they could be good Witnesses if they were not, as they said they were, *asleep* when the thing was done; and if indeed they were *asleep*, when it was removed, they could not be positive how it was remov'd, they could not say he was *not risen* from the Dead.

6. Another thing that may be consider'd in order to shew how very improbable, or rather how impossible it was that the Gospel History should ever have gained Credit in the World if it had been false, is this; that it was a History of such Matters, and was so contrived that it might with the greatest Ease have been disproved, so the Matters therein related were in themselves, and especially in their Consequences; such as must needs have engaged a great many to make the strictest Examination that was possible into the Truth of them; and if they had discovered any thing Falshood therein, to make known their Discovery to the World.

For the whole Doctrine of Christianity was grounded upon the Truth of the Evangelical History; This disprov'd would have destroy'd that, and

being admitted, there was no way to put a stop to the spreading of it; And the certain Consequence of receiving the Christian Religion in the World, was the Abolishing of all the other Forms of Religion that were then any where receiv'd or establish'd; even of *that* which had been introduc'd by *Moses* amongst the *Jews*, by the Appointment of God himself, as well as of the several sorts of *Paganism* and *Idolatry* that were received in other Countries. Now when any Religion, be it true or false, the establish'd Religion of a Country, there must needs be a great many engaged by the strongest Worldly Interest to support and maintain it. For it was not only at *Ephesus* that a great number of *Craftsmen* got their *wealth* by making *Silver Shrines* for *Diana*, (*Acts* 19. 24. &c.) but in every other Contry the Living of a considerable Number depended upon the Religion that was therein received; which being destroy'd, and their Trade or Profession thereby at an End, they must of necessity be hard put to it to get Bread by taking up some new Employment. And besides, there is nothing that *all Men*, of what Trade or Profession soever they are, are generally so zealous and concern'd about, nothing that they are so afraid of any Change or Innovation in, as Religion; *This*, be it well or weakly founded, yet if it be that Form of Religion that they have receiv'd from their Fathers, and been bred up in from their Childhood, they will not easily change.

So that I said too little, when I said before that a *great many* must needs have been engaged to set themselves to discover the Falsity of the *Evangelical History*: for this was in truth the common Concern of *all Mankind*, except only of those few Persons who had been instructed by our *Saviour*, and believed him to be the *Christ*: All others, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, Rich or Poor, Learned or Ignorant, Priests or People, were engaged either by *Interest*, or *Prejudice*, or *Conscience*, or upon some other account to convict the Apostles of Falshood in their Relation of the *Matters* contain'd in the *Evangelical History*; and if any Falshood had been therein, it is impossible (considering how obvious it must needs lie to Discovery; and how many were at Work to find it out) that they could have failed of their Aim; And if any one had made the Discovery, it can't be imagin'd he would have been long before he had imparted to others a piece of News so very welcome as that would have been to the Generality of Mankind; or that such a Discovery of the Falsity of the *Gospel History*, in any particular, once made and publish'd, should ever after have been stifled or suppress'd; be cause the same Reasons that put them at first upon making the Discovery, were of the same force afterwards to engage them to preserve the Memory of any Discovery of that kind that had been made.

And therefore I add, in the last Place; And 'tis that which gives Weight and Strength to all that has been said before upon this Subject, and fully compleats that Argument which I am now upon for the Proof of the Truth of the *Gospel History*.

7. That notwithstanding the Easiness of the Disproof of this History if it had been false, and the incessant Endeavours of the Adversaries of Christianity,

stianity, to find out some Falshood therein; (to do which they were not only prompted by their own Interest and Inclination, but also frequently and boldly challenged by the Christians themselves; as may be seen in the ancient Apologies for the Christian Faith) it is nevertheless a *History* of very good Credit now (cavilled at perhaps, but not denied, nor pretended to be disproved either by *Jews*, or *Mahometans*, or any other sort of Infidels) and that it has been of the like good Credit for many hundred Years past, even ever since the first Publication of it; and that 'tis not so much as *contradicted* in any Point, by any other Historian that lived in or near the Time of its Writing, was in a Capacity to contradict it upon good Grounds; *viz.* upon either certain Knowledge of his own, or very credible Information from others that any *Matter* therein had been falsely related.

True, perhaps the Infidels will say, There is indeed no History of competent Antiquity now *extant*; by which the Gospel History can be disproved; but that there has been no such History cannot with certainty be affirmed. This therefore (say they) is our Unhappiness, that tho' we have a good Cause we are destitute of Means to support it; and are in the Condition that the *Israelites* are said to have been in the Days of *Saul*, when they had War with the *Philistins*, 1 Sam. 13. 22. *It came to pass in the Day of Battle there was neither Sword nor Spear found in the hand of any of the People.* But what was the Reason of this? Why, the *Philistins* had *disarmed* them; ver. 19. they had taken away the Weapons they had before, and would not permit more to be made. And this, say the Infidels, is exactly our Case; In the War we have now with Christians we are forced to fight *without Sword or Spear*; And tho' for other good Reasons we are confident the *Gospel History* is false, and are resolved never to believe it, and make no doubt but that in former Times it has been opposed and contradicted; yet in this the Christians have been too hard and too cunning for us; that while they have kept their own Weapons they have sily taken away ours; for they have been careful to preserve the ancient Books that were written by those of their own Party in Defence of their Superstition, but the Books of their Adversaries they have been as careful to suppress and destroy; and they have had such good success in it, that of all the Books or Discourses of the ancient Champions of *Judaism*, *Paganism* or *Deism* (*Trypbo*, *Celsus*, *Porphyrus*, *Julian*, and other great Names) not much is now remaining besides *fragments* (and those perhaps imperfectly or falsely cited) to be pick'd up out of the Books of those who have written Answers to them, who, we may well presume, took notice only of those Passages therein which they thought were easiest to be answer'd. But this is no unusual thing, for the powerful and prevailing Party to stifle that Evidence which they know not how to disprove, and to suppress those Books which they cannot answer. And this, say they, we take for a good Argument that there was something very considerable in these Books, and not easily to be answer'd, because otherwise the *Christians* of former Time would have been more willing that they should be preserv'd and transmitted to after Times, than so Posterity upon a fair Hearing of all that has been said on both sides, might be able to pass a right Judgment upon the

safe, and either to chuse or to reject the Profession of Christianity, with Prudence and Discretion.

This is what has been sometimes suggested by the Enemies of our Religion; add indeed I know not what else can well be said to invalidate that Proof of the *Gospel History* which I am now upon. But what slender ground there is for this Suggestion, and how very little the Christian Cause is affected by it, a few Words will suffice to shew.

For, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that tho' indeed there are no Histories now being whereby the *Gospel History* can be disproved, 'tis possible however there may have formerly been several Narratives extant that were perfectly contradictory to it, and those too perhaps better attested and confirmed than the *Gospel History* was: To this I answer; That 'tis never allow'd to be a good Proof that a thing is, to say that 'tis possible it might be. And besides, if this surmise or suggestion of a thing barely possible be a good Objection against the *Gospel History*, it is as much an Objection against all other ancient Histories; if for this Reason the *Gospel History* be not credible, no other History is so; for there is no ancient History in the World now extant, which we can be sure was never contradicted by some other, as ancient History, that is not extant.

But, 2. As there is no Evidence that the *Gospel History* was contradicted when it was first publish'd, that is, when, if it had been false, it might most easily have been disproved; so there is on the other side, as good Evidence as such a matter is capable of, that it never was thus contradicted or disproved; Because if the Facts recorded in the Evangelical History had been then denied or disproved by any competent and credible Witnesses, 'tis impossible that the Christian Doctrine, which was grounded upon and chiefly establish by these Facts, should ever have spread so fast as by the Confession of all Parties it did, from the time that it began to be Preach'd by the Apostles. Nothing but the strong Evidence that there was of the Truth of the *Gospel History* (and strong it cannot be accounted, if there was stronger and better Evidence on the other side) could have supported the Profession of Christianity, (when it had nothing to recommend it self by but its Purity and Truth) against that violent Opposition which it met with every where in the World.

And, 3. Whereas 'tis further suggested, that the loss of those ancient Books which are supposed to have been written to disprove the *Gospel History*, is owing to the Power and Subtily of the Christians of those early times, who thought it best to stifle that Evidence which they could not gainsay or refute; this Suggestion is manifestly as groundless as 'tis malicious.

For many Books of all sorts and of all sides, have perish'd by Accident, or been worn out by Time, without any formal Design of any Party or Persons to suppress and destroy them; And I see no reason why these Books written, in contradiction to the *Gospel History* (if indeed any such were ever written) may not have perished one of these ways as well as many other Books have done.

Or if a Reason must needs be given why some Books (and why these particular) have been lost, while others of the same or greater Antiquity have been preserv'd; I think the little Value that Men generally had for those Books that are lost, is the best Reason that can be given why they were suffered to perish; and that the most probable Cause of Mens having so little value for them, was because the matter of them was so evidently false, or the Reasoning of them so manifestly weak and fallacious, that no Man thought it worth his while to be at the Pains or Charge of getting them transcribed.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with will not allow this to be a good Account of the Loss of such very valuable Books as they think these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were, let them find out a better; But I am sure that that before suggested by them, *viz.* that it was by Design; the first Christians purposely abolishing and destroying all Testimonies and Records that made against them, is a much worse Account of it, and infinitely more improbable than that which I have given.

For it must be supposed either that these *Anti-gospel-Histories* were written very early, as soon almost as the Gospel-History was Published by the Preaching or Writing of the Apostles, or else in after Times; And if they were destroyed by the Christians, this must have been done, either soon after they were written, or else after they had been for some time received and allow'd as true Histories by the Adversaries of the Christian Faith.

Now if it be supposed that these Books were not written till a good while after the Apostles had preach'd, and the Evangelists written the Gospel; they were written too late to be of sufficient Authority to weaken the Credit of the Gospel History: For how could those that were not born when the things recorded in the Gospel were said to be done, pretend to contradict the Testimony of those who were living at that time, and who testified either that they saw them with their own eyes, or that they received that Account of them which they published from very credible Persons, who said they had been Eye witnesses thereof?

But if it be suppos'd that these Books were written sooner, even as soon almost as the Evangelists wrote, or the Apostles began to publish, by their Preaching, the Gospel-History; then I say 'tis impossible they should be suppress'd and destroy'd by the Christians, either then, or afterwards.

Not then; for tho' we grant that Christianity from the very first preaching of it, made a very swift Progress in the World; and from a beginning no bigger than a Grain of Mustard-seed, grew up quickly to be a goodly Tree, shadowing many Nations under the Branches of it; yet it did not spring up like a Mushroom in a Night; it did not grow to this bigness all at once. And what were the Christians in the weak and infant state of the Church, but with an Handful of Men in comparison their numberless Opposers, and those too without Wealth, without Power, of no Interest or esteem in the World; that they should undertake to corrupt or still the Evidence that was given against them, which was supported by the secular Power, and gladly receiv'd and embrac'd by all other Men but themselves?

ves? What were they, that they should be able to call in all the Books that had been written against them, and to suppress and destroy them at their Pleasure? and that too so fully and effectually, as that with the books themselves which they destroy'd, all Memory of them should likewise perish? A powerful and prevailing Party, with the Government on its side, may indeed do much in this kind, and yet hardly so much as this; ~~but they that believe the Christians to have been such a powerful and prevailing Party, with the Government on its side, may indeed do much in this kind, and yet hardly so much as this;~~ But they that believe the Christians to have been such a powerful and prevailing Party early enough to hinder the spreading and dispersing of any Books that were written against them, believe without any ground or warrant from History, a more unaccountable and incredible thing than any that is recorded in the Gospel. But if this could not be done then, it might perhaps be done afterwards: For in progress of time 'tis certain (it may be said) that the Christians did come to be of very great power and interest, and able to bring down all their opposers; and 'tis likely enough that then they might themselves to destroy all those Monuments of Antiquity whereby their glorious Gospels had been contradicted and disprov'd; And 'tis not incredible that they should so far succeed in their attempt as to leave no means for Posterity to discern how weak and sandy a Foundation their Religion was built upon.

But this Supposition (taking it altogether) involves a greater Difficulty, and supposes a greater Miracle than the former did. For whatever Christians might attempt to do, or whatever they might be able to do, after they had attained to such great power, and were become the most numerous and prevailing Party; 'tis utterly incredible that they ever should have attained to such great Power, that they ever could have become the most numerous and prevailing Party; 'tis utterly incredible that they ever could have attained to such great power, that they ever should have become the most numerous and prevailing Party, if indeed the Gospel History had almost from the very beginning, been opposed and contradicted by other Histories that were more credible than the Gospel History was.

For it must be, and is granted by all, that at the first Preaching of Christianity all worldly power and Interest were on the other side, and engaged themselves strongly to hinder the Growth and spreading of it. Now when both is on one side, and power and interest on the other, 'tis not impossible that Truth may at last prevail against interest, and bring the Power to be of its side; But if Truth (I mean that which hath most appearance of Truth, I say if Truth) and Power and Interest are all on the same side from the beginning (as it must be allowed, they were, by those who say that the Gospel History was quickly prov'd false by other Histories written and publish'd about the same time) than I say it is utterly impossible that an Imposture quickly discover'd to be an Imposture, and which serv'd only worldly Interest, should ever have so gained ground as Christianity, against that apparent Truth and mighty Power and Interest that were

on

on the other side. So that whatever Progress Christianity might be made for a short time at first, by reason of the Boldness and Confidence of its first Preachers, it must needs be that immediately from and after the time that the Anti-Gospel Histories (of better Credit and Authority than the Gospel History was) were publish'd, it must have declined much faster than it had before increased; and in a very few years have so dwindled to nothing, that 'tis like in the Age in which we live there would hardly have been so much as any Remembrance of it left.

And now, if nothing more could be said upon this Subject (for I have not time at present to take into Consideration the other Proofs before hinted at of the Truth of the Gospel-History) I think what has been said is ready enough to shew that there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to the Evangelical Writers, in their Relations of those matters of Fact which they have recorded; This I am sure of, that upon much less Evidence and Assurance of Truth than we have in this, we generally give Credit to other Histories.

For we believe other Historians in their Relation of such matters as they could not have so certain Knowledge or so good Assurance of as the Evangelical Writers might have of those plain matters of Fact and Sense which they have related in their History.

And again, we believe other Historians giving an Account of things which they do not pretend to have had a *personal Knowledge* of; which were done in *Countries* far distant from them; and in times long before them; which their Readers had no means to enquire into the Truth of which were done in secret, or when but few were by; and which if they were falsely related, none were engaged by any worldly Interest to be so much pains to disprove.

And lastly, If *two Historians* of the same Antiquity give different contradictory Accounts of the same matter, we do not for that Reason alone presently reject either of them; but we enquire which of them is in the best Capacity to know the Truth, and which of them is the least liable to the suspicion of falshood, and which Story is the most probably related, and to the Belief of that we incline.

If therefore there be any Man that thinks there is any truth in History and who does give Credit to other Histories, (and I believe there is no Man but does so) and yet will not be persuaded to allow that the Gospel History is very credible, (which contains a Relation only of such matters of Sense as it was morally impossible there should be any Cheat or Deceit in; and in which if there had been any Deceit or Mistake it was morally impossible that it should not be discover'd or disprov'd; and which yet, neither is now nor ever was contradicted by any History of competent Antiquity and good Credit;) I think we may very well conclude that 'tis not Reason or Judgment; but Prejudice or Interest, or the Lust of some Vice or Lust that makes him an *Infidel*.

The end of the Fourth Sermon.

THE FIFTH SERMON.

St. L U K E xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

THE Subject I was upon in my last Discourse on these Words, and which I left unfinish'd, was to shew, That there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to the Authors of the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament* in their Relations of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded.

For the Propof of which I propos'd these following Things be consider'd; (1.) The *Nature, Conditions and Circumstances* of the *Matters* they have recorded, and of the *History* itself. (2.) The good *Capacity* they were in to know the *Truth* of the Things they have related. (3.) The strong *Obbligations* they were under to write nothing but the *Truth* according to the best of their *Knowledge or Information*. (4.) The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty and Faithfulness*. And (5.) Lastly, The *Confirmation* that was given the *Truth* of their *History* by *God himself*.

The last Discourse was spent in the Consideration of the first of these Things. I proceed now to the Second, viz.

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(1.) The

(2.) The good *Capacity* that the Writers of the *Evangelical History* were in to know the Truth of those Things which they have related.

Now the Matters of History which are related in the *Epistles* are but few, and those, for the most part, such as had been done by, or had happen'd to, either the Persons that wrote them, or the Churches or Persons to whom they were written; so that of these we shall not need to say any thing.

For the Bulk or Body of the *Evangelical History* is contain'd in the *Four Gospels*, and in the *Acts of the Apostles* and of the *Authors* of these Books, there is no Controversy in the Christian Church; and if they were written by the *reputed Authors*, a few Words will suffice to shew that they were in a very good *Capacity* to know the Truth of the Things they have recorded, much better than most other ancient Historians, whose Relations, nevertheless, are generally thought worthy of Credit.

For St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, two of the four *Evangelists*, were of the number of those Twelve who were in constant Attendance upon our Lord, from the Time that he first began to Preach and to make Disciples, until he was taken up into Heaven; so that they were themselves Eye or Ear Witnesses of most of the Things which they have recorded.

Of St. *Mark* and St. *Luke* indeed the same cannot be said neither is it certain that they were of the Number of the Seventy Disciples, (tho' that be affirm'd by some of the Ancients :) But this I think is agreed to by all; that St. *Mark* was for some part of his Life a constant Companion of St. *Peter*, who was not only one of the *Twelve*, but, most probably, the *First* that was call'd to be an Apostle, and who was also one of the *Three* with whom our Lord was most intimate and familiar (for we often read, (*Matth. 17. 4, 26, 37. Mark 5. 37.*) that *Peter*, and *James* and *John* were singled from the rest to be Witnesses of some of the most private Transactions of his Life :) And it was generally believ'd in the Ancient Church, that St. *Peter* was more truly the Author of the Gospel call'd St. *Mark's* than St. *Mark* himself. He being only the *Scribe* or *Emanuelis*, and St. *Peter* the

Person

person that dictated the things written by him; whence also this Gospel is by some of the Ancients styled *the Gospel of St. Peter*. And of this there seem to be some Tokens even in the History it self; particularly in that Relation that is therein given of St. Peter's Denial of his Master, and of his Repen-
 tance for it; for his Denial is there told with some more Cir-
 cumstances than in the other Gospels, (such as the Person him-
 self chiefly concern'd was best able to know and might best
 remember;) And the Account that is given of his Repen-
 tance, is by this Author expressed more modestly (as it best
 became a Person to speak who spake of himself) than it is by
 the other Evangelists; for St. Matthew and St. Luke say that
 he wept bitterly; but St. Mark (or rather St. Peter himself
 stating those Words) only says, that when he thought there-
 on he wept.

It is likewise agreed on all Hands, that St. Luke, if not one
 of the Seventy Disciples (which, 'tis most probable he was
 not) was, however a very early Convert to Christianity;
 that he conversed frequently with the Apostles and immediate
 Disciples of our Lord, and was a constant Companion of St.
 Paul, for a good while, in his Preaching and Travels; so
 that of all the Things which he relates in his *History of the
 Acts of the Apostles* he might be, and of much the greatest
 part of them, 'tis most probable, and of some, 'tis certain,
 that he was an Eye or Ear-Witness.

So then, there are three of the five Historical Books of the
New Testament that were written by those who were present
 at most of the Things which they have related, (viz. the
 Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John, and the *Acts of the A-
 postles*;) and another of them, tho' it bears the Name of St.
 Mark the Person by whom it was penned, yet if it was (as
 has been generally believ'd) dictated by St. Peter, may be
 added to that number, and be likewise reckon'd the Testi-
 mony of One who was an Eye Witness of the Things he has
 related.

In this respect therefore the *Gospel History* is manifestly as
 credible as 'tis possible any History should be; for no Histo-
 rian can record any thing upon better Assurance of its Truth
 than the Evidence of his own Senses.

But

But the *Gospel of St. Luke*, it must be granted, is not of this sort; He himself does not pretend that the *Matters* he recorded were of his own Knowledge; he only says, *he had perfect understanding of them from the very first, from those who from the Beginning were Eye-witnesses and Ministers of the Word*, Luke 1. 2, 3. And of some few *Matters* recorded by the other *Evangelists*, the same must likewise be granted (particularly of the Things that were done before they were called to be *Apostles*; of these Things, I say, must be granted) that 'tis most probable they were not *Masters* of their own Knowledge, that they recorded them only upon credible Information from others; But when 'tis considered on the other hand, that there are very few Things related by *St. Luke* which are not to be found in some of the other *Gospels*, his *Testimony* that he had perfect Information of the Things he has recorded from several *Eye-witnesses* adds a Degree of credibility even to the other *Gospels*, and is a good corroborating Evidence of their Truth; and all *Matters* recorded by him, or the other *Evangelists*, only upon Information of others, must be granted to be more credible than the *Matter* of most other ancient Histories of good Credit is, if we reflect upon what was said in the former Discourse concerning the *Nature and Circumstances* of the Things recorded; particularly, that they were such Things as might be most certainly known, and were capable of the best *Attestation*; and that they were Things done in the same Age and in the same Country in which they lived who have written the History thereof.

And what hath been said is, I hope, sufficient to shew the good Capacity and *Authors* of the Historical Parts of the *New Testament* were in to know the Truth of the Things they have recorded; most of them being such as 'tis probable that the *Evangelists* (as two of them, without all Dispute) were *Eye-witnesses* of, and the rest such as they might have certain Information of from several Persons then alive, and well able to witness the same.

Of the Ability then of these *Authors* to write a true History of these *Matters*, I think, there can be no reasonable Doubt.

and that there is as little Reason to doubt of their Honesty and Faithfulness, will in part appear, if we consider in the third place,

(3.) The strong *Obligations* they were under to write nothing but the Truth, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information.

Now the *Obligations* that Men are under to speak or write Truth, may be reduc'd to Two Heads, *Honour* and *Conscience*; by both which the Evangelical Writers were more strongly obliged to Truth in their Relations than commonly other Historians are.

I. One Obligation that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but what is true, is *Honour*. For there is nothing that is generally accounted more base or dishonourable than to tell a Lye; there is nothing that by those who stand most on their Honour is thought more reflecting and disparaging, and more necessary to be resent'd as an high Affront, than to have the Lye given them. What therefore is generally thought to be a great Reproach it may reasonably be presumed (unless the contrary appears) a Man will be careful to avoid, by not giving any just Occasion to have it cast upon him.

And this is one Ground of that great Credit that is generally given to ancient Histories, 'tis presum'd (unless there be evident cause to think otherwise) that the Authors of them were Men of so much *Honour*, and that they had such a sense of the Reproach and Discredit that it would be to them to be found out in a Lye, as made them careful not to record anything as a certain Truth, but what they had good Knowledge or Information of.

But that this *Obligation* to Truth was stronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History*, than on most other Historians, is abundantly evident from what was noted the last time concerning the Nature and Conditions of the Things by them related, and of their History of them.

For the Matter of most other ancient Histories is such that the Historians might report many Things untruly, or upon slight Information, and yet be pretty well assur'd that they

should not be reputed Liars ; because the *Matters* recorded by them being Things either done in some *Places* a good way off, or in some *Time* long before, or in the Presence of but few Persons, they might know that none of those into whose Hands their Histories would fall, would be in a Capacity to contradict them tho' they were false ; Or they might reasonably suppose that their Readers would rather acquiesce in their Report, than travel so far, or take so much Pains as they must have done to disprove it ; especially if it was a Matter of no great Consequence to their Readers, whether their Report was true or false.

But in the Gospel History the Case was quite otherwise, and the Historians themselves could not but know that it was so. For there were a great many concern'd to find out some Falsity in it, and there were a great many that would have taken any pains to have done it ; and yet the *Matters* related by the *Evangelists*, and their Manner of relating them were such, that their History, if it had been false in any particular might have been disprov'd with the greatest ease, without being at any Pains to do it ; because most of those into whose Hands it first came, would either have known it to be false or would readily have been told that it was so, by abundance of Persons that could of their own Knowledge have contradicted it. So that if it be supposed that the *Evangelists* had any regard at all to their own Reputation, it can't be imagin'd either that they did record any thing contrary to their Knowledge, or that in *Matters* that were not of their own Knowledge they neglected to get the best Information and Intelligence that could be had ; because if they had done either of these, they could not have been so vain as to hope to escape being Censured as the most notorious and shameless Liars that ever wrote. But,

2. The strongest *Obligation* that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but the Truth. is *Conscience* ; And the sense that all Men supposed to have of the natural Turpitude of a Lye, is the chief ground of that very great Credit that we give to humane Testimony in Cases of the greatest Concern and Consequence.

But this *Obligation* to Truth was likewise stronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History*, than on most other Historians ; 'twas indeed so very strong, that nothing less than an evident Proof of their Falsity can justify the entertaining so much as a suspicion of it.

For to speak and write the Truth was what they were obliged to, not only by the Law of Nature to which all Men are alike subject, but also by the Rules of that Religion which they had been bred up in (by which they had been expressly forbidden to *lye one to another*, Lev. 19. 11. and by which they had been taught that *a False Witness that speaketh Lyes is an Abomination to the Lord*, Prov. 6. 16, 19.) and especially by the strict Command of him whom they had lately taken for their Master, and whose Laws and Religion they were to preach and propagate in the World, by which they were obliged, and under the severest Penalty, no less than External Damnation, *to put away all Lying, and to speak every Man the Truth to his Neighbour*. Eph. 4. 25. Rev. 21. 8.

The *Subject Matter* of their Relation did also lay upon them the strongest *Obligation* to have a strict regard to Truth in every thing that they wrote. For if it be a Sin to speak an Untruth in any *common Matter*, it is manifestly a greater Sin to do it in *grave and serious Things*, when Truth is most expected ; and especially in *Matters of Religion*, wherein a Lye is most unbecoming ; And if it be a Sin to utter a Slander, or to tell a Lye of a Man, it is evidently a Sin of a more heinous Nature, to report an Untruth concerning God, and to utter a Falshood in the Name of God ; and if to lead Men into any Mistake by a false Relation be a Practice not to be justified, altho' the Mistake they are led into be of no hurtful Consequence either to themselves or to the World, it is evidently a great Aggravation of the Lye, if Men are thereby deceived in a Case of the nearest and dearest Concern to them, if they are led thereby into an Error that may prove fatal to them to all *Eternity* ; And lastly, If it be a very great Sin, only once to speak an Untruth that may be prejudicial to one Man, it is plainly the greatest and the most unpardonable Sin of this kind to record an Untruth, with a Design thereby to

deceive to their Everlasting Destruction all the Men that shall ever be born into the World in all future Ages.

If therefore the *Gospel History* be false, there was manifestly such a *Complication* of most horrid *Wickedness* in the Publishers and Compilers of it, as it is not fair to suppose even one single Man would be guilty of ; and much less can it be reasonably supposed that *several* Men (*viz.* not only the *Four Evangelists*, but all the other *Apostles* who preach'd the same Things that they wrote) did consent to the reporting of so many, and such *notorious* and *hurtful Untruths*.

But this, it may be it will be said, is not a direct proof that the *Evangelists* were true and faithful in their Relations, but only a probable Ground of presuming that they were so. And I grant it is no more, but nevertheless, I think, if nothing more could be offer'd, this alone would be sufficient to render their Testimony highly credible, so long as nothing is alledged on the other side to disprove it ; and in all other Cases we allow it to be so. For by the Testimony of Persons of whose Truth we have no other Assurance but such a *probable Presumption*, all Questions and Controversies of the greatest Concern, relating to the Lives and Estates of Men, are in this World finally decided ; every Man that bears Witness in any such Case being, by the common Judgment of Mankind taken and accepted as a good Witness, unless the contrary appears ; and by the Testimony of two or three such Witnesses we all consent that every *Matter* should be establish'd.

But then I add further, that besides this reasonable Presumption of the *Truth* of the *Witnesses* of the *Gospel History* (which is all that we ordinarily have, or do desire in other Cases) there is as good positive Proof of *their Truth* as can be required. And this was the next Thing propos'd to be consider'd, *viz.*

(4.) The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Fairfulness*.

And here it may be noted (for tho' it be a Thing that we lay no great stress upon in this Case, yet I think 'tis not to be omitted, because 'tis one of the best *Evidences* that we can have

ve of the Faithfulness of any Historian, whose personal
 character is unknown to us) that the Authors of the Evange-
 al History seem to have related all *Matters* with the great-
 est *Impartiality*; that they seem as free in telling the Things
 that were, or might be accounted disgraceful to their Master
 themselves, as in telling those Things that were most glo-
 rious and reputable. For thus, in their History of the Life
 of *Christ*, as they tell us the wonderfulness of his Birth, the
 many Miracles that he wrought, the Testimony that was gi-
 ven him by the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, and by
 the Voice of God, his Glorious Resurrection from the Dead
 and Ascension into Heaven; so they stick not to tell us also
 the Meanness of his Parentage, the Obscurity of his Birth,
 his poor and low Condition in the World, the Affronts that
 were given him, the Contempt he was had in, and the shame-
 ful Death he was put to. And of themselves, They have left
 upon Record to all Posterity, that they were of the mean-
 est Extraction, and bred up to very poor or scandalous Em-
 ployments, that they were Fisher-men, Tent-makers, Pub-
 licans; They own that they were ignorant and unlearned
 men; They tell their own Childish Mistakes about the Na-
 ture of the Kingdom of the *Messiah*; They mention their
 own foolish and ambitious Contentions with one another about
 worldly Greatness; They confess their own Baseness and
 cowardice in forsaking their Master when in Danger, after
 the most solemn Profession of Friendship, and repeated Assu-
 rances of Steadfastness and Fidelity. St. Peter's Denial of
 Christ is a thing noted by all the *Evangelists*, and by St. Peter
 himself (if the Gospel of St. *Mark* be accounted his) is told
 with its worst Circumstances; and St. Paul freely owns, that
 before his Conversion to Christianity he was a *Blasphemer*, a
persecutor, and *injurious*, and the *chief of Sinners*. Now
 their Recording such Things as these concerning their Ma-
 ster and themselves, as it is an Evidence of their *Impartiality*,
 is consequently a good Argument of the Truth of their Histo-
 ry; for had they allow'd themselves a Liberty of varying from
 the Truth in any particular, it cannot be imagin'd but that
 they would at least have concealed their own Frailties and In-
 firmities;

firmities; it can't be suppos'd they would have furnish'd their Adversaries with *Matter* wherewith to reproach them.

But 'tis possible that an Historian who means to deceive his Readers in some *Matter* of greater Moment, may purposely insert some few such Passages as these, thereby to gain himself an easier Belief in other Things, and to cover his wicked Design. 'Tis therefore another and a better Evidence of the Truth of the *Gospel History*, that the *Evangelists* and other Witnesses of the Facts recorded in the Gospels, were Persons not liable to any just suspicion of Unfaithfulness in their Relation; because, whatever they had been before, they were then in all other respects Persons of a very good Character. *Ye are Witnesses* (says the Apostle) *and God also, how boldly and justly and unblameably we behaved our selves among you* 1 *Thes.* 2. 10. They that could not be charg'd with any other Crimes were not justly to be suspected guilty of *Forgery* and *Lying*. And we have abundant Reason to believe that they were in all other respects unblameable, because there is no Evidence that they were ever charged at all (either truly or falsely) even by their greatest Enemies, with any other Fault but only too great Zeal and Industry in Propagating the Religion. And 'tis no wonder that this should be thought a Fault by those who were of another Religion; or that by the Powers that then were, who endeavoured with all their might to suppress the Growth of Christianity, the Apostles were so zealous to spread it should be look'd upon as *disaffected* to their Government, and *Movers* of *Sedition*; but however this, if it had been a Fault, was not such a Crime as could justly have render'd their Honesty suspected, but on the contrary, it was rather a very good Argument that however they might possibly be mistaken, yet they did believe in themselves; 'tis a fair Proof that they thought they had good Evidence of the things they testified, and that they reckon'd themselves under a strict Obligation to testify the same.

For 'tis plain (and that's another good Argument of the Veracity) that they could have no Worldly End or Design either in the Framing or Publishing of those Stories which they related; so that if they were Fables which they

they were far from being *cunningly devised Fables*, because, as the World then was, they could not be so vain as to hope to raise themselves either to *Honour* or *Wealth* by preaching a *crucified Messiah*; to the *Jews* a *Stumbling Block*, and to the *Gentiles*, *Foolishness*. Now 'tis not to be supposed that any Man will frame or report a Lye for *nothing*: Whoever knowingly deceives another, must be supposed to intend some advantage to himself thereby: And therefore, if there be no *Untruth* appearing in the Relation, and no Gain or other advantage that the Reporter can be supposed to make to himself by it, it may very reasonably be presumed that the Report is true. But so far was this, if it was a Lye, from being a profitable and advantageous Lye to the Forgers and Reporters of it, that on the contrary it was, and they could not but readily foresee that it would be very prejudicial to their *Worldly Interests*, exposing them to all sorts of Persecutions from all sorts of Men; For both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and every Sect and Parry of every other Religion, however hating one another with a mortal Hatred, readily joined together to persecute the *Christians*, and those above all others who were the *Witnesses* of *Christianity*, the *Ringleaders* (as they called them) of the *Sect* of the *Nazareens*.

This therefore may be reckon'd another Evidence of their Truth; (and as 'tis a stronger Evidence of Truth than any that has been yet mentioned, so 'tis such an one as I believe no History in the World has, but that of the Gospel) *viz.* That no *Threats* or *Punishments* could move the *Witnesses* of those Things that are recorded in the *Evangelical History* so much as to desist from giving fresh Testimony to the Truth of the Things which they had once related. For this seems to have been all that was ever required or expected from them; not that they should retract the Testimony they had given, but only that they should *not speak or teach any more in the Name of Jesus*, Acts 4. 18. 5. 46. And upon this Condition alone any of them might have expected both a Pardon for what he had done before, and likewise all fitting Favour and Encouragement. But this was what they all refused to do, giving no other Reason of their Refusal but this, that

that they were very sure of the Truth of the Things they had spoken, and that there was a necessity laid upon them to preach the Gospel. *Whether, say they, it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,* Acts 4. 19, 20. And the more they were threatened to hold their Peace, so much the more boldly did they speak, not only filling Jerusalem with their Doctrine, but likewise spreading the same in all the World. And tho' they knew that in every City where they came Bonds and Afflictions did abide them; None of these things moved them, neither did they count their Lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their Course with Joy, and the Ministry which they had receiv'd of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God, Acts 20, 23, 24.

And if these Proofs and Evidences already mentioned of the Truth and Faithfulness of the Apostles and Evangelists are not thought sufficient to gain them Credit, what is there that would be sufficient? for more Evidence, or better Proof cannot reasonably be desired, so good is very rarely to be met with, or expected; And indeed I think there is but only one stronger Proof thereof that can ever possibly be given by Men; and that is when a Witness lays down his Life to confirm the Testimony he has given; for if when a Man has witnessed any thing, and is question'd for it, and threatned with Death if he persists in it, he still continues boldly to testify the same thing; and especially if when upon the Rack or on the Cross, in the midst of the sharpest Torments, and even at the Hour of his Death, he justifies the Truth of his former Testimony, he certainly gives the best Assurance that 'tis possible for any Man to give of his Honesty and Truth; and if any human Testimony be credible, this is certainly so in the highest Degree.

That therefore our Belief of the Gospel might be built upon the surest grounds, it pleased the Divine Wisdom so to Order it that all those who were the first Witnesses thereof to the World, should give likewise this best possible Proof of their Veracity. For of all the Apostles and Evangelists of the man

ner of whose Death there is any Memory preserv'd either by History or Tradition, St. *John* is the only Person that did not seal the Testimony he had given with his Blood. And that he did not suffer Martyrdom as well as the rest was not occasioned by his forbearing to repeat the Testimony he had before given, and much less by his Retracting it, but was merely an Act of Divine and Miraculous Providence, whereby tho' he was put into a Cauldron of Boiling Oyl, his Life was preserv'd; so that in Truth, considering the Hazard he ran of his Life, which could not have been sav'd but by a Miracle, he may very well be accounted a Martyr for the Testimony of Jesus, no less than the other Apostles, altho' he did not actually expire under his Sufferings as they did.

Now if it be supposed that a Man, especially one who stands much upon his Credit, may be willing, after he has told a Lye, to suffer a great deal rather than own himself a Liar; (tho' I think it cannot reasonably be supposed, either, that any Man would suffer so many great Evils as the Apostles did, only upon a point of Honour; or that the Apostles did stand so much upon their Honour) yet when it is brought to this, that a Man who has told a Lye must either retract it, or die for it, and that he may in all probability save his Life by retracting it, it is not to be supposed that any Man will be a Martyr for a known falshood; for it is a very true Saying, and to which there is hardly any Exception, tho' it was spoken by the Father of Lyes, that *Skin for Skin, yea all that a Man hath he will give for his Life?* Job. 2. 4. 'Tis not credible therefore that so much as one Man should be found so foolish as to Sacrifice his Life to a known Lye, and that too an unprofitable Lye, to himself, to his Family, and to all the World; and this only to save his Reputation; it is much less credible that so many Men, viz. All the Apostles and Evangelists, and most if not all the rest of our Lord's immediate Disciples should be guilty of such prodigious and unheard of Folly; and it is least of all credible that among so many as there were that bore Witness of the Facts recorded in the Evangelical History, not so much as one man should be found that was honest and wiser than
the

the rest; not one that could be persuaded to give Glory to God by the Confession of his Fault, and Satisfaction to the World by a publick owning of the Cheat he had been engaged in; not one that would chuse to undergo the Disgrace of a Lyar rather than the shameful Death of a Malefactor.

These are in short the Evidences we have of the Honesty and Faithfulness of the Evangelical Historians, those Evidences I mean which they themselves have given thereof and they are plainly as good as could be desired, they are the best that could be given by men.

And putting together all that hath been said on this and the foregoing Heads, now, and in my last Discourse, for the Proof of the Truth of the Evangelical History, I think we may truly and confidently affirm, that altho' we consider it only as a meet humane History, we have much greater reason to give Credit to it than to any History in the World besides.

But if we receive the Witness of Men, (and who is there that does not ?) the Witness of God is greater; 1 *Joh.* 5. 9. And therefore in order to shew further that there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to the Evangelical Historians in their Relations of those matters of Fact which they have recorded, I proposed to be consider'd, in the fifth and last Place

(5) The Confirmation that was given to the Truth of their History, by God himself. For what St. Paul says of his own, was likewise true of the Speech and Preaching of all the other Apostles; viz. That it was in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power; 1 *Cor.* 2. 4, 5. that the Faith of their Hearers should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the power of God. And so St. Luke says, *Acts* 4. 33. With great power gave the Apostles Witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. For at that same time that they witnessed the Miracles of their Master, they gave Assurance to Men of the Truth of their Testimony by doing the like Miracles themselves, healing the sick, casting out Devils, raising the Dead, &c. just as Jesus himself had done. And at the same time that, pursuant to their Commission, they Preached the gospel to men of all nations and languages, they plainly demonstrated both that they had such a Commission from God,

and that it was the truth of God which they preached, by
 speaking to every Man of every Nation in his own Tongue.
 Thus as the Author to the *Hebrews* says, *God did bear them*
witness both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Mira-
cles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will.
 ch. 2. 4. And he might well say, that God did hereby bear
 them Witness, because that Power wherewith they were en-
 dued was so evidently from on high, *Luke 24. 49.* that none
 could but see their Works, and considered withal the purity and
 excellence of the Doctrine of Christianity that was thereby
 established, could have any reasonable Doubt whether they
 were done by the power of God or no. *We know, said Ni-*
codemus to our Saviour, that thou art a Teacher sent from God,
no Man can do the Miracles that thou doest, except God be
with him : Joh. 3. 2. *But the same Works that Jesus did, did*
his Disciples also, Joh. 14. 12. after he had sent down the
 promise of his Father upon them, on the Day of Pentecost;
 and greater Works than those did they do; so that who-
 ever beheld their Works, might so far as Miracles are Evi-
 dences of a Divine Power) be rather more certain that God
 was with them, than *Nicodemus* could be, that he was with
 the Lord himself. For tho' their other Miracles, that were
 of the same sort with those which our Saviour had done, were
 no proofs of Divine Assistance as could not, with any Rea-
 son be gainsaid; yet, I think it may truly be affirm'd, that
 the Gift of Tongues, which was peculiar to them, and
 wherein they did (as we may say) excell even our Lord him-
 self, was more convincing than any of them; For he that
 could do one of their other Miracles might possibly entertain some
 doubt whether the Effect that appeared to him to be
 miraculous might not yet be done by some secret power of
 natural Causes that was unknown to him; But we all know
 the power of Nature so well, that we are sure, the Know-
 ledge of a Language cannot possibly be attained Naturally,
 but by a person of the quickest parts and faithfullest Memo-
 ry; but in so much time, at the least, as it will necessarily
 be up to be told by Tutors, or to learn from Lexicons, what
 every particular word of the Language to be learnt, is by the
 Peo-

People of that Language designed to signify; because We have not a natural Relation to the Notions or Things thereby expressed, but are meer arbitrary signs thereof. So whoever knew the Education of the Apostles, and that they were before altogether ignorant and unlearned, and yet they were every one, on a sudden, on the day of Pentecost, able to speak readily in all the Languages of all the Nations under Heaven, from whence had come some of the *Jews* that were present at *Jerusalem* at that time, could have no possible Doubt of their Supernatural Assistance; They that heard them speak with Tongues, which they had never learned, could not but conclude that it was the *Spirit that gave them this Utterance*, Acts 2. 4. because nothing else could give it. So that this wants not only (as their other Miracles were) a Proof of Inspiration, but likewise an Instance and Example of it; It was a Proof of an inward and invisible Inspiration by an Inspiration that was (as I may say) outward and sensible; by an Inspiration that was discernible even by the daily senses of all those that were present.

But be it so, perhaps the Infidels will say, that they saw the Miracles which the Apostles are reported to have done in the Name of Christ, had Reason enough to believe their Testimony concerning him, and as well that which they have left in Writing, as that they gave by word of Mouth; yet what's this to us that live now? For we neither saw the Miracles that they wrought, nor heard them speaking with Tongues; neither have we any Assurance that they ever did either the one or the other but only from themselves. They indeed tell us that they did a great many wonderful things (such as we are willing enough to grant could not be done by the power of God) in confirmation of their Testimony concerning Jesus; But we see no more reason to believe their Testimony concerning themselves, than there is to believe their other Testimony concerning him; so that this cannot in Reason be reckon'd a proof or confirmation of the other. Nay, rather we think they are less credible Witnesses in their own Case than they were in his. So that to us the History of the New Testament (granting it to be written by the

Writings) is of no more Authority than their Writing it (considered only with respect to their Natural and Moral Capacities and Qualifications) could give to it; because that Seal of Miracles which is said to have been affixed thereto by God, now, by length of time quite worn off; or at least the Impression thereof is now so defaced, that we cannot distinguish of what Seal it was, or whether it was a true Seal or a Counterfeit one; and that this Seal was over affixed to their Testimony is testified only by those same Witnesses, whose the Testimony it self was.

To this Objection therefore (which it must be confessed, has some appearance of Weight and Reason in it) I answer,

I. By denying the Ground it is built upon, *viz.* That the Testimony of the Apostles themselves is the only proof we have of the Miracles which they wrought for the Confirmation of their Testimony concerning Jesus. For besides the Testimony of the Apostles, in their Epistles, and in the Acts, Witnessing their own Miracles, we have likewise the Testimony of all the other Christian Writers, whose Books are preserved, that lived in or near the Apostle's Times, Writing the same thing; and this Testimony, not only given at first, but were in secret, in order to the making Profelytes of such as they found to be easie and credulous: but in the most public manner, in those Apologies for the Christian Faith which were presented to Magistrates, and published to the whole World, in which, for Proof that these Miracles had been wrought by the Apostles, they appeal to all the Histories and Records of the Apostle's times then extant; in which they challenge any that could do it, to contradict their Testimony, in which they testify that the same Miraculous Power still continue in the Christian Church, and was sometimes exerted, often enough, and openly enough to prove its being, tho' not so frequently as it had been by the Apostles themselves, when there was more need of shewing it, *viz.* at their first preaching of the Gospel.

Now these things, if they had not been true, the first Christians, in the Circumstances they were then in, would not have dared to affirm; and if they had been false, they might easily have been disproved, and they would most

certainly have been at least boldly denied and contradicted by the profess'd Adversaries of the Christian Faith. But they did not deny or contradict, they did not offer to disprove the report that was then generally believed of the Miracles that had been done by the Apostles. Nay so far were they from that that there is a good evidence from Antiquity still remaining that several even of those who took upon them to oppose the Christian Doctrine did yet expressly own that great and mighty Works had indeed been done by the hands of the Apostles as well as of their master; But then they had been done, they said, (and that was all they could say in the Case) by Magic Art, by the help of the Devil; just as the *Jews* had said before of our Saviour, *Matt. 12. 24. This Fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.*

I shall not stay now to shew how groundless as well as malicious this Suggestion was with reference both to our Lord's Miracles and to theirs, because I suppose I shall have a better Occasion to do it hereafter in my next Discourse, 'tis enough for my present purpose, if the matter of fact only be granted, viz. that the Apostles did do many Miracles in the Name of Christ, and to confirm their testimony concerning him; And that they did so cannot I say, be reasonably doubted, because 'tis witnessed not only by themselves, but by all the Christian Writers of those or the succeeding times, and is not denied, nor is granted even by their Adversaries and Opposers. But,

2. If we had not so good Proof of the Miracles done by the Apostles, if there were no witnesses thereof but themselves, I say however that their Testimony alone would be very credible, nay indeed the thing testified by them must, I think, necessarily have been acknowledged by us, altho' there had been no History or Record at all of it transmitted to our times. I do not mean that without the Light of History we could have known that they did just those very Miracles which are recorded; but I say that without this we might have known in general that they did do Miracles, or that they were assisted by a supernatural Power; (This, I say, we might have been sure of by the permanent effects of such a Power, continuing at their times, and testified by all Historians, Heathen as well as Christian, of all Ages ever since; and which are even extant and visible.

For that a great part of the world is now Christian we see and know, and that it has been so for many Ages past we are as sure as we are that there have been any Ages past before our own; and looking back to see when and how it came to be so, we learn by the concurrent Testimony of all History, *Jewish, Pagan and Christian*, that Christianity had its beginning in *Judea*, just at that time in which the Sacred History places it; And by the same concurrent Testimony of all History we learn that in a very short time, in less than forty years after, it was Preach'd in all the Provinces of the *Roman Empire*, and in all other Countries of the world that were then known, and of which we have any History left; and that wherever it was Preached it made a very swift Progress, insomuch that in a few years the number of Christians became very considerable and bare a great Proportion to the People of all other Religions; For it was not much above threescore years after the Apostles had dispersed themselves in order to Preach the Gospel to the *Gentiles*, when *Pliny* Proconsul of *Bithynia*, wrote that Epistle to the Emperor *Trajan*, wherein giving an account of the Christians then under a severe Persecution for their Religion by the Emperor's Order, he tells him ' that there was a great Number of Men obnoxious to Sufferings upon that account; that many of all Ages of all Orders and Degrees and of both Sexes were every day called in question for it; that the Contagion of that superstition (as he calls it) had spread it self not only in great Cities; but also in Towns and Country Villages, insomuch that the Temples of the Heathen Gods, had for some time before been in a manner desolate, and their Worship and Sacrifices intermitted,

Now this is certain that there can be no effect without a cause of sufficient Power to produce it; and it was evidently impossible that Christianity should make so swift a Progress, and prevail so much in the World, as it did, in so short a time, only by Natural Means. For without good Skill in the Languages of the several Nations wherein the Apostles were to Preach the Gospel, it had been in vain for them to have gone about to Convert all Nations; Or if they had at-

ed it, 'tis impossible it should have been with success; And how can it be conceived possible that twelve grown Men, who before understood not a word of any but their own Mother Tongue, and that perhaps not well, who had never been bred up to Study, and who were then past the proper Age of learning Languages, should yet be able in so short a time to become perfect Masters of all the Languages then in use in the World, so as to speak them readily and fluently, as if every one had been their own Native Tongue? and that after this, they should have time enough still left to go and preach the Gospel in all Countries? So that the speedy Conversion to Christianity of such a great Number of Men in all parts of the World by their Ministry, is a direct proof of that Gift of Tongues wherewith we believe they were endued: And whoever can believe that they had this Gift, which was peculiar and extraordinary, and such as had never been heard of in the World before, may, I think, more easily believe all the other Miracles that they are reported to have done, which were not near so wonderful, which were such as had been done by other Prophets in former times.

But suppose this Story of the Gift of Tongues to be false, and that indeed the Apostles were Men of such ready Natural Parts as to be able to learn all the Languages which they could have any use of in as few days as it would have taken other Men Years to do it in; or else that they had in truth been bred up to the Study of Languages from their Childhood, and only concealed their Knowledge thereof until that famous day of *Pentecost*, that so then it might be taken to be Miraculous; Yet what could Twelve Men furnished with this excellent Skill, do by their own Natural Power only, towards the Conversion of the World to Christianity in so short a time?

For 'tis to be considered that the Religion which they were to Preach in the World was the most contrary that could be to the Carnal Lusts and Passions of Men; that it promised no Worldly Greatness, no increase of Riches, no Enjoyment of sensual Pleasures; but on the contrary taught

all those that embrac'd it, to be mortified to all these Things, and not to set their Affections on any Things here below.

'Tis to be consider'd also, That it propos'd to Man's Belief such Doctrines as to the carnal Minds of Men could not but appear foolish or incredible : As that the Eternal Son of God did for our sakes become Man, and take on him the Form of a Servant ; that in that Form he *submitted* to be scornfully used, cruelly Scourged, and at last barbarously Crucified as a vile Malefactor by his own Creatures ; That this same *Jesus* was afterwards declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the Dead ; That he was taken up into Heaven, seated at the right Hand of the Father, had all Power in Heaven and Earth *committed* to him, was ordered to be Worshipped and Adored by all Men with the same Honour wherewith they honour the Father, and was appointed by God to be the Judge of the quick and dead, &c.

'Tis to be consider'd likewise, that it was a Religion perfectly destructive of all other Forms of Religion then receiv'd or establish'd in the World ; and upon that Account only must needs meet with the strongest Prejudices ; all the Men it was preach'd to being before from their Childhood bred up, and already fixed in another way.

And lastly, 'tis to be consider'd further, that the *Facts* upon which this Religion was grounded, that is, by which the Divine Mission of the Lord *Jesus* was proved, *viz.* his *Miraculous Works*, were such as being above the known Power of Natural Causes were not like to be easily credited. That he healed the Sick ; That he gave Sight to the Blind, Hearing to the Deaf, Speech to the Dumb, Feet to the Lamé, and Strength to the Cripples ; That he did cast out Devils ; That he rais'd the Dead, and all these only with a Word's speaking ; That he fed sometimes great multitudes of Four or Five Thousand with only so much Bread and Fish as to appearance was not sufficient for twenty Men ; and that after they were all satisfied, there was more in bulk left in Fragments than there had been before in whole Provision ; That he walked on the Water as on dry Land ; That he had the Winds and Seas obedient to his Command ; and above all, That he rais'd himself to Life

after he had been three days Dead : These, and such like, were strange Stories to be told to Men, in order to persuade them to take upon them a new Religion.

What then, I say, could *twelve Men*, tho' never so well furnish'd naturally with Parts and Learning, and all other Endowments proper to qualifie them for such a Work, do towards the persuading the World to embrace Christianity? Suppose they had gone (not as they did, one into this Country, another into that; often singly, seldom more than two in Company; but *all together* in a Body into some one Country remote from *Judea*, and there with *concurrent Testimony* born Witness of the Things they had seen and heard; yet who would have believ'd their Report? The Report of Strangers coming from a far Country, and of whose Honesty and Truth they could have no Assurance but only from themselves vouching for one another? Who would have given Credit to a Relation of such incredible Stories, told with a Design to introduce a Religion that was unknown to their Fathers? and such a ridiculous Religion too, as this, at the first Proposal, would probably appear; *viz.* the Worshipping as God, a Man, who, by their own Confession, was rejected and set at naught, and at last Crucified as a wicked Malefactor by his own Countrymen.

Or if it can be supposed that the Apostles, by the Boldness of their Speech and the *inticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, might after some time have prevail'd upon some few to become Profelytes to their Religion; yet the multitude of their Disciples could not have been very great, before the Government of the Country would have taken the Alarm, and have called in Question these *Setters forth of new Gods*, these *Movers of Sedition among the People*, as they would certainly have been accounted, and as, in fact, the Apostles were accounted in every place where they came. And this would quickly have put a stop to a growing Sect; They that liked the Religion well enough before, because it was new, would quickly have left off to like it when they saw it would be dangerous to profess it; 'tis not likely their Followers would have continued to stick to them, when they perceiv'd the Government and the whole

whole Nation in general engaged on the *other* side, and resolved by all means possible to *extirpate* the Belief they had entertained ; and when they saw their Preachers Imprisoned and Scourged, tortur'd and put to Death, they would quickly have deserted the Service of a Master, who, they would then readily think, was not of power to save either himself from the Cross, or his Disciples from Suffering. And after this, had the residue of the Apostles, who might possibly have escaped Martyrdom in this Country, gone into another, there they must have expected the like Reception and Usage, and not *better* in a third, and so in a few Years their Lives would have spun out in doing nothing, and their Religion would have perish'd with themselves.

And if their united Testimony would have had so *little Credit*, much less can it be supposed that the *single Witness* of one Apostle only could ever have gain'd any Credit at all ; and yet unless the Testimony of some single Witnesses had been believ'd, 'tis impossible there should have been, in so short a time, so great a Conversion of Men to Christianity in all parts of the World, by the preaching of so few Men.

So that whoever believes that Christianity could make so swift and so great a Progress as 'tis certain by all History it did, only by the preaching of the Apostles, without any *miraculous Gifts* or *supernatural Assistance*, wants not Faith enough to be a Christian, if he had but a Will to it ; for he believes already a much greater Miracle than any that is recorded in the *Evangelical Story*.

And now by all that hath been said, in this and the last Discourse, I hope it appears that there is sufficient Reason to give full *Credit* to the *Authors* of the Historical Books of the *New Testament*, in their Relations of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded. This I'm sure I may say, That there is not so good Reason to give Credit to any History in the World besides, of the same Antiquity ; and that a History so well confirm'd as this is cannot reasonably be rejected, nor indeed any ways be discredited, but either by some *other* more credible History contradicting it, or by some *intrinsic Evidence* of Falseness.

But *better or more credible History* contradicting it, I have already observ'd, there is not, nor indeed is there any History contradicting it that is of sufficient *Antiquity* to disprove it. Nay, there are many very considerable Things of those recorded in the *Gospel History* that are occasionally mention'd by other Historians of those or the succeeding Times, who had no design thereby to do any Service to Christianity; as namely, that there was such a Man as *John the Baptist*, that he was a Person of great Piety and Austerity, and a Preacher of Righteousness, and that he was put to Death by *Herod*: That there was also a Man named *Jesus*, who call'd himself and was own'd by many to be the *Christ*, that he did many wonderful Things, and was at last Crucified by the *Jews*: The Names of some other Persons likewise spoken of in the *Gospel History* are mention'd under the same Character in some other Histories, as *Pilate*, *Felix*, *Festus*, *Caiaphas*, *Agrippa*, &c. In other Histories also we find notice taken of the Cruelty of *Herod*, in slaying the Infants at *Betlehem*, and among them (*as 'tis thought*) his own Son; which made *Augustus*, when the Story was told him, to say, that it was *better to be Herod's Swine than his Son*; and likewise of that remarkable Eclipse of the Sun, when the Moon was at the full, which the *Evangelists* say happen'd at the time of our Saviour's Passion; and of that violent Earthquake that was at the same time, and lastly of the prodigious Increase of Christianity in all Parts of the *Roman Empire*, soon after its first publication.

And if upon this Occasion it should be said that the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History*, and the Events that follow'd thereupon, were so very wonderful and remarkable, that if they had been true they must in all probability have been more taken notice of than they are in other Histories; I answer, That supposing them to be true, it could not be reasonably expected that more mention should have been made of them by other Historians than there really is; because they were plainly foreign to their purpose, or else such Stories as tho' they had heard of them they did not believe, having perhaps never taken any pains to examine into Truth of them. For what was it to the purpose of an *Author* that was writing the

have the Life of one of the *Roman* Emperors, or the History of
 some famous War, or giving an Account of the Affairs of
 the Civil State, to make a large Digression concerning a *Re-*
ligious Sect begun in *Judea* by a Person that was despised in
 his own Country, and carried on and continued by *mean* and
contemptible Persons who made no Figure in the World? Or
 how could it be expected that an Historian who was not him-
 self a *Christian* should yet give a large Account of the Mira-
 cles of our Saviour and his Apostles, and other Facts upon
 which our Religion is grounded; which had he believ'd (as
 he must be supposed to have done, if he had deliver'd them
 to Posterity as Truths) he must have been a *Christian*? 'Tis
 enough in all Reason, and as much as could be expected in
 his Case (supposing these Facts to be true) that they are not
 by any Historians that were of another Religion, contradi-
 cted or attempted to be disprov'd: more than this would
 have been too much. And should we now in some ancient
 Manuscript History new brought to Light, and bearing the
 name of some *Jewish* or *Heathen Author*, find a large and
 formal Account of any of those Facts relating to the *Chri-*
stian Religion that are recorded in the Gospel; this would
 give very just ground to suspect, that the whole History
 (whatever other appearance it had of Truth) was forged and
 counterfeit, or at least that those Passages speaking honour-
 ably of the *Christian Religion* or the Author of it, were
 slavishly foisted into the Book by some *Christian Transcriber*.
 For this is indeed the best Argument that is brought to dis-
 credit some Passages of this kind that are now to be found in
 some *Heathen* or *Jewish* Historians, and particularly in *Jo-*
sephus, viz. that they say more than was proper or likely to
 be said by *Heathen* or *Jews*; that if those Passages are genuine,
 and the *Authors* had believ'd what they themselves wrote; they
 must have been *Christians*.

Now this I'm sure is not fair Dealing, that the *Paucity* and
 tenderness of those corroborating Testimonies to the Truth
 of the *Christian History* that are to be met with in other Hi-
 storians, and that the *multitude* and *fulnes* of such Testimo-
 nies, should both be urged as Arguments against Christianity.

And

And therefore when they are both urged (as they are and have been by our Adversaries (we may reasonably conclude that the Truth is in the Mean ; and that there are indeed no more nor no fewer Testimonies of this kind to be met with in other Writers, and that they are not either more or less to the Purpose, than (supposing the Christian History to be true) might fairly be expected.

It only remains then that we enquire whether there be in the Gospel History, any intrinsic Evidences of Falseness. And 'tis pretended by the Adversaries of our Religion, that there are many such ; For there are, they say, some things related in the Gospel History, that are altogether incredible ; and there is, they say, oftentimes great Difference, in the several Relations of the same Story, by the several Evangelists ; and not only so, but there are, they say, besides, in their several Histories compar'd together, some flat Contradictions and Repugnancies.

I intended therefore at the End of this Discourse, if I had had time for it, to have spoken largely upon this Subject ; but because I have not, must refer you to those Books that have been written on purpose to give an Account of the difficult Texts of Scripture, and to reconcile those that are seemingly repugnant ; or for want of such Books to any good Commentary on the Bible, in which you will hardly fail to meet with Satisfaction in any Difficulty of this kind, if you read it with a Mind disposed to receive Satisfaction. And I shall conclude this Discourse with only observing in General,

1. That the pretended *Impossibilities* that are said to be related in the Sacred History, are only *Difficulties* ; They are indeed Events above and beyond the known Power and common Course of Nature, but they are such as are easily Credible when they are ascribed, as they must be, to the Almighty Power of God.

2. That the Difference that may sometimes be observ'd in the several Relations of the same Story by the several Evangelists, is very inconsiderable ; consisting only in this, That one perhaps relates the Story in a different Order of Things than another does ; or that One tells it briefly, another more

have large; or One with a few, another with more Circum-
 stances; or that some Circumstances are mentioned by each
 of them which the other had *omitted*. So that this Observa-
 tion is so far from being a just Objection against the Truth of
 Pur History, that it is rather a Proof and Confirmation of it;
 'tis an Argument that the Evangelists did not conferr to-
 gether in the Writing of their Histories, and that they did
 not Copy or Transcribe from one another; but that every
 one of them reported the Story he wrote in such manner as he
 himself remembred it to have been, and with such Circum-
 stances as he himself took most notice of. And,
 3. As to the Repugnancies and Inconsistencies that are said
 to be in the Evangelical History; these we absolutely deny.
 We have not time now to consider, or attempt to reconcile all
 the Places that are pretended to be contradictory to each o-
 ther, but those Passages which seem most liable to this Excep-
 tion, are, I think, the Relation of Judas's Death, and the
 account of our Saviour's Genealogy.
 But as to the first, There is plainly no *Impossibility*, no
contradiction in it, if we should say that after he had *hanged*
himself, as St. Matthew says, (*Matth. 27. 5.*) he did *fall*
down, and *his Bowels gush'd out*, as St. Luke affirms, (*Acts*
18.) Or it may be that he did not hang himself, but only
fail'd (*ἀπὸ ῥῆγος*) *choaked* or suffocated by the violence of his
 grief, and that the same Passion by which he was strangled
 made him also *fall down headlong and burst assunder in the*
middle, so that all his Bowels gushed out. And as to the other,
 'tis remembred that by the Jewish Law the next of Kin
 was to raise up Seed to his near Relation that died without
 issue, (*Deut. 25. 5.*) by Marrying his Widow, and that the
 first-born of the Woman after such second Marriage was re-
 garded in Law the Son, as well as he was the Heir, of the De-
 ceased; so that consequently the same Person might be the
 Legal Son of one Man, and the Natural Son of another Man;
 it may be difficult, perhaps impossible for us, at this Dis-
 tance of Time, to say with certainty which of the two differ-
 ent Lines by which our Saviour's Pedigree is deduced from
 David is the Legal, and which the Natural Line; it is very
 casie

ease nevertheless to believe that one is the *Legal*, and the other is the *Natural* Line; and if so, there is plainly Contradiction between the two *Evangelists*, altho' *St. Matthew* makes our Saviour to be descended from *Solomon*, *Mat. 1. 16.* and *St. Luke*, from *Nathan*, *Luke 3. 23.* altho' *Matthew* says that *Joseph* the Husband of the Blessed *Virgin* was the Son of *Jacob*, and *St. Luke* that he was the Son of *Heli*.

And now the Truth of the Gospel History being, as I hope, by what hath been said, sufficiently establish'd, I shall proceed to shew, That if the *Matters of Fact* related in the *New Testament* are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and Divine Authority of all the *Doctrines* that are there Taught: But I am sensible that I have trespassed too much upon your Patience already, and so shall reserve this for the Subject of my next Discourse.

The SIXTH SERMON.

As to the Proof of it. Part III.

St. LUKE xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: But if one were raised up unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one were raised up from the dead.

IN Order to shew that we have sufficient Reason given to convince us of the Truth and Authority of the *New Testament*, and of all the *Doctrines* that are taught

I have formerly propounded to shew, 1. That we have sufficient Reason to believe that the Books of the New Testament were written by those Persons who are said to be the Authors thereof; 2. That there is sufficient Reason to give all Credit to them in their Relation of those matters of fact which they have recorded; And, 3. That if the Matters of Fact therein recorded are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and Divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught. And the two first of these points I have, I hope, already made good.

I proceed now to the Third; viz.

3. To shew that the Doctrine of the Gospel is well grounded upon the History of it; That if the Matters of Fact recorded in the New Testament are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and Divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught.

And here, by the Doctrines of the Gospel, I understand both the Articles of Faith which it proposes to our Belief, and the Rules which it prescribes to our Practice. Many of the former of which are themselves parts of the Gospel History, as the Incarnation, Life, Sufferings, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Saviour; and the rest, of both sorts, are taught in the New Testament, either by our Saviour himself, or by his Apostles.

And I suppose it will be readily granted that all the Doctrines are true, and also of divine Authority, if it shall appear that they were commission'd and sent by God to instruct the World; for *he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God*, Joh. iii, 34.

The single point therefore to be consider'd at this time is, whether there be sufficient Evidence from the matters of fact recorded in the History of the New Testament, that our Saviour and his Apostles were Commission'd and sent by God to instruct the World.

And first whether there be sufficient Evidence from hence that our Saviour himself was a Teacher sent from God.

Now

Now that he said he was sent from God, is a matter of Fact, and a part of the Gospel History. *Job. 12. 49. have not spoken of my self, but the Father which sent me, gave me a Commandment what I should say, and what I should speak.* See *John 5. 37, 38. 8. 38. 14. 10. 24.*

And that he said that he was the *Messiah* which had been foretold by the Prophets, is likewise matter of Fact, and a part of the same History, *Job. iv. 25, 26. The Woman of Samaria saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things.* *Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.* *Mat. 16, 17. Mar. 9, 41. Luke 24. 46. Joh. 9. 47.*

The Question therefore is, whether from the things which are recorded of him by the Evangelists, there be sufficient Ground to believe the Truth of either or both these pretences I say of either or both of them, because either of them is a sufficient Reason to receive his Doctrine as True and Divine. For which cause therefore I shall not, in speaking to this Subject distinguish between the Evidences which the Gospel-History affords of his being a Prophet, and those which it affords of his being the Messiah, but shall propose them promiscuously as they come to mind.

And here I shall consider, first the Credibility of our Saviour's own Testimony concerning himself; and Secondly The Confirmation that was given to this Testimony by God grounding all that shall be said on both these Heads, upon the Gospel-History; the truth of which I now take for granted as being, I hope already sufficiently proved.

First then, I shall consider the Credibility of our Saviour's own Testimony concerning himself, when he said that he was sent by God, and that he was the Christ the Son of God.

And I know 'tis commonly said that a Man is not to be believed in his own Cause. And this very thing was objected to our Saviour by the *Jews*, *Joh. viii. 13. Thou bearest Record of thy self, thy Record is not true.* But this Saying is without Exception.

When indeed what a Man Witnesses is for his own Benefit, his Testimony, if it be single, may reasonably be rejected.

matter; especially, if any Proof be made that at other times he
 hath told a Lye; or done any other ill thing for his Advan-
 tage; But otherwise a Man's Testimony concerning himself
 may be credible; nay in some cases it may be more credible
 than another Man's; because he may sometimes be surer of
 what he says concerning himself than another Man could be.
 And therefore our Saviour, who in *Joh. 5. 31.* allows of
 the Reasonableness of that Saying; *If I bear Witness of my-
 self my Witness is not true;* yet when this very thing was af-
 terwards Objected to him by the *Pharisees*, in the place be-
 fore-cited, makes answer in the following Words; *Tho' I
 bear Record of my self, yet my Record is true, for I know whence
 I came, &c. Joh. 8. 14.* And that the Testimony of our
 Lord concerning his own Divine Mission was such as we
 might rationally give Credit to, tho' we had no other Evi-
 dence of it, will, I suppose, sufficiently appear, if these fol-
 lowing things be consider'd.

1. That his whole Life (according to the account that is
 given of it by the Evangelists, which we now build upon,
 as true) was in all respects spotless and unblameable; *He did
 no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth; He was a
 Lamb without blemish and without Spot. 1 Pet. 2. 22. 1
 Pet. 1. 19.* And this he himself urges as a Reason why his
 Testimony ought to be credited; *Joh. 8. 46. Which of you
 convinceth me of Sin? and if I say the Truth why do ye not
 believe me?* And a very good Reason it was; for it could
 not justly be suspected, that a Person of whom no other ill
 thing could be said, was yet indeed in the whole Course of
 his Life guilty of a Crime of the greatest Magnitude, *viz.* of
 Lying in the Name of God; of saying, that the Lord had
 sent him, when indeed the Lord had not sent him, nor spo-
 ken by him.

2. It may be also consider'd, that this Testimony of our
 Lord, tho' it was concerning himself, yet was not for him-
 self; I mean it was not for his own worldly Advantage. And
 this consideration he himself offers to the Jews, as an Argu-
 ment of the Truth of his Testimony, *Joh. 7. 18. He that
 speaketh of himself seeketh his own Glory; but he that seeketh
 his*

his Glory that sent him, the same is true, and no Unrighteousness is in him. Had the Doctrine of our Lord, which he pretended was what God had commanded him to teach, been contriv'd to advance the Worldly Honour and Greatness of himself or his followers, this would have been a just Prejudice against it, and a reasonable ground of suspecting that he spake of himself; but when it was evident to all that heard his discourses, (and is no less so to us that read them) that he sought not his own Glory in any thing, but the Glory of him that sent him, and that his whole Doctrine tended to advance the Honour of God, and to promote the practice of Piety and Vertue in the World; this rendred his Testimony very credible when he said he was sent by God to teach it to the World; for when a Doctrine is plainly worthy of God, and according to Godliness, 1 Tim. 6. 3. it may reasonably be presumed that God is the Author of it.

3. It may be further considered, that this Testimony of our Lord concerning himself was so far from being to his own Benefit, that it was as much as any thing could possibly be to his worldly disadvantage, exposing him to the Envy and Malice of the *Jews*, and to the Jealousie of the *Romans*, and to all the Cruel Sufferings which he endured from both of them. And certainly a Man's Testimony concerning himself may be allow'd to be credible if it be against his own Interest, if he himself be a great loser or sufferer by what he Testifies; for it can't be imagined what else but only the Evidence of Truth, and an Obligation to declare it, should ever induce a Man to say such Things concerning himself, as will procure his own mischief.

And I know not what can be said to avoid the Force of this Argument for the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony, that he was sent from God, and that he was the *Messiah*, unless it be that he was disappointed in his expectation; and that he hoped to make himself Rich and great in the World by these Glorious Pretences, tho' in the Event it prov'd otherwise. But the Gospel History furnishes us with a very clear and full Answer to this Objection, in those many *Predictions* of our Lord therein recorded concerning his own Sufferings, *Matth.*

16. 31. 20. 17. whereby it clearly appears, that the Sufferings which befel him for giving this Testimony concerning himself did not happen to him unexpectedly, but that he knew long before all that afterwards came to pass. And therefore I say again, that no Reason can be imagin'd why he should say that he was sent from God, but only because he knew it was true, and had received a Command from his Father to declare this Truth to the World. Especially if it be considered further —

4. Lastly, That he continu'd to testify the same at his Death which he had done before in his Life, giving thereby the best Assurance that a Man can give of the Truth of his Testimony. For the main matter of this Accusation to Pilate was that he had given out himself to be the Messiah, and the Messiah was (according to the expectation of the Jews) to be a great Temporal King; had our Lord therefore but denied this Charge, had he but granted that he was not the Messiah, he might have saved his Life. But this he would not do; he disowned indeed the false Notion that the Jews had of the *Messiah; my Kingdom* says he, *is not of this World*; but that he was *John 18. 26.* King, and that he was the Messiah he bold- *Mat. 27. 11.*ly owned, as well when the Question was put *John 11. 37.* to him by the *Roman Governour*, who had power of Life and Death, as when it had been put *Mat. 26. 63,* *64. Mar. 14-* to him before the High-Priest. This therefore *61, 62.* is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of his

Testimony of our Lord; and is alone sufficient to make it credible, that he witnessed the same good Confession before *Pontius Pilate*, 1 Tim. 6. 13. which he had done before his own Nation, and Sealed his Witness with his Blood. For 'tis not to be suppos'd that any Man tells a known Lye for nothing; and it was plainly then too late for him, to hope for any good to himself in this World by persisting in his Testimony; his only hope had been in retracting it) and 'tis not credible that any Man should be so foolish as to expect to better himself in the other World, by dying with a Lye in his Mouth.

Thus, I hope, it appears that the Testimony of our Lord

concerning his own Divine Mission, was credible in it self so that we might rationally believe, that he came from God and that he was Christ the Son of God, altho' we had on his own word for it.

But we have more than his own Word for it ; *I am not alone*, says he, *Joh. viii. 16. &c. but I and the Father that sent me. It is also written in your Law, that the Testimony of two Men is true ; I am one that bear Witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth Witness of me.* And this was the other thing I propos'd to consider, in order to shew the good Reason that we have to believe that our Saviour was sent from God, and that he was the Messiah ; viz.

Secondly, The Confirmation that was given to this Testimony of our Lord, by God himself. And this was given in several ways.

1. God bear him Witness by the Testimony of ancient Prophets ; And to this our Saviour frequently appeals, *Joh. 39. Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me ;* And again, *46. Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.* 2 Pet. 1. 18, 19. And this St. Peter (comparing it with that Voice from Heaven testifying him to be the Son of God, of which he himself had been an Ear-witness) calls a more sure word of Prophecy. And indeed it was as certain an Evidence of his Divine Mission as could be desir'd.

For it was a matter of the greatest Concern to the World to discern the promis'd Messiah, that so they might know whom to believe, and from whom to expect Salvation : And to this end God was pleas'd, by the Mouth of all his Prophets since the World began, to give several Marks and Characters of the Messiah, by which he might be certainly known, and readily distinguish'd from all Impostors ; for they foretold exactly the time of his Coming, his Pedigree, and the Place of his Birth, the manner of his Life, the things he was to do, the sufferings he was to undergo, and all the remarkable Accidents that were to befall him in this World ; all which Predictions were punctually fulfill'd in the Person of our Blessed Saviour, as must be granted by every one that allows the

truth of the Gospel-History, And this is an undeniable proof that he was the Messiah ; for it is manifestly inconsistent with the wisdom of God, when he meant to give Marks and Characters by which the Messiah might be certainly known, to give only such as might belong to another Person no less than to him ; and it is no less inconsistent with his Goodness that his Providence should ever permit that all the Marks and Characters of the true *Messiah* should meet together in an Impostor ; because by this, *Mankind* must have lain under an inevitable necessity of being cheated in a matter of the greatest Consequence to their Eternal Salvation.

But the ancient Prophecies of Christ were many of them Types or Figurative Expressions, not readily to be understood 'till they were accomplish'd, nor then very easie to be applied by every one to the Person of the true *Messiah* without the Help of a Teacher. *How can I understand what I said* (said the *Eunuch*, Acts 8. 31. even when he was reading one of the plainest Prophecies of Christ that is in the Old Testament) except some man should guide me ? And therefore God was pleased to give a yet more certain and distinct Knowledge of him to the men of that Generation in which he appear'd ; And this he did —

2. By the Testimony of *John* the Baptist, who was a burning and a shining Light ; and did not, as the former Prophets had done, only lay down *Marks* and *Characters*, by the wise Application whereof *Men* might discern the *Messiah* when they saw him ; but pointed to him as it were with his finger, as he stood before their Eyes, so that the simplest among them could not but know whom he meant ; *Behold, says he, the Lamb of God which taketh away the Sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a Man which is preferred before me.* Joh. 1. 29, 30.

And to this Testimony of *John* our Saviour himself frequently appealed, as to a Testimony that was full to the purpose and could not be denied ; *Ye sent unto John*, says he, *and he bare witness unto the Truth*, Joh. v. 32. Mat. 21. 23, &c. And when the chief Priests and Elders question'd him about Authority, he perfectly confounded them by only asking

them whether the Baptism of *John was from Heaven or Men*; for that *John* was a Prophet, altho' he did no Miracle was so evident to all by the wonderful manner of his Birth and the miraculous Circumstances that attended it, that they could not; and he was also so generally receiv'd and accepted among the People as a Prophet, that they dar'd not deny. If they say, *we shall say of Men, all the People will stone us for they be perswaded that John was a Prophet*; and yet had they granted this, which they could not deny, they had answered their own Question, and seen clearly by what Authority our Saviour acted and taught; for no Testimony of his Divine mission could be plainer and clearer than that of *John* was; and it was a thing granted by the *Jews*, that *he* was a prophet without all doubt and needs no farther Trial, unto whom another Prophet bears Witness.

3. Another way by which God gave witness to our Saviour, that he was sent by him, and that he was the *Messiah* was by a Voice from Heaven; which Testimony was given him three times.

Mat. 3. 16. 17. First, at his Baptism, when being come out of the Water, the Heavens opened, and the Spirit like a Dove descended upon him, and there came a Voice from Heaven, saying,

Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And of this Voice 'tis highly probable St. *John Baptist* was an Ear-witness; for 'tis said expressly, that *he saw the Spirit descending like a Dove from Heaven, and abiding on him*, and that was at the same time that the voice

Exod. 24. 15, &c. was uttered. *John* 1. 32.

Matt. 17. 5. A Second time was at his Transfiguration on the Mount, when the

Mar. 9. 7. Glory of God appearing in a Cloud, as it had anciently us'd to do, then

Luke 9. 35. came a Voice out of the Cloud which said, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.* And at the uttering of this Voice, three of his Apostles

2 Pet. 1. 17. were present, two of which have witnessed the same to us under their own

John 1. 14. Hands. *1 John* 5. 7.

A Third was after the raising of *Lazarus*, when were present not only his Apostles who constantly accompanied him, but several others both Jews and Greeks. *John* 12. 20. 28. And his Voice was so loud as to be heard by all that were present; tho' not by all so distinctly and articulately, as it was by some, who, as 'tis probable, were nearer than the rest; which was the occasion of that Difference that was among the People concerning it; *some saying that it Thundered, and others, that an Angel spake to him,* *Ver. 29.* To doubt therefore of his divine Mission whom God thus testified to by Voices from Heaven, is to *make God himself a Liar*, as the Apostle speaks, *1 John* 5. 10. *because we receive not the Record that he gave of his Son.*

4. Another way by which God gave Witness to the divine Mission of our Saviour, was by enduing him with the Gift of Prophecy, or foretelling Things to come.

Several Instances of which we meet with *Matth. 16. 21.*
in the *Gospel History*; for he foretold very *20. 17, &c.*
often his own Sufferings and Death, with *Mark 9. 31.*
all the remarkable Circumstances thereof; *10. 33.*
He said that he should be betray'd by one of *Matth. 26. 21.*
his own Disciples, when none of them suspected that there was a false Brother among *John 6. 70.*
them, and the Traytor himself knew not yet the falseness of
his own Heart; He told *Peter* but a few
Hours before, that he should deny him *Matth. 26. 34.*
thrice; when He at the same time was very
confident of his own strength, and declar'd himself resolv'd
to die rather than deny him once; He told
the rest of the Disciples that they would all *Matth. 26. 31.*
forsake him, when they every one profess'd
themselves resolv'd to suffer with him, rather
than leave him; He signified before *John 3. 14.*
by what Death he should die, and who *8. 28. 12. 32.*
should be instrumental therein; He assur'd *Matth. 16. 21.*
his Disciples that after three Days he would *26. 32. 28. 16.*
rise again, and appointed them a Place in
Galilee, where they should all see him; He Propheesied that

notwithstanding the Contempt he was had in, and the greater Contempt that his ignominious Death would bring upon him,

his Religion should by *their* means (a Company of poor illiterate Fishermen) be preach'd with good success in all Parts of the World; *Mat. 24. 14.* He foretold likewise the utter Destruction of *Jerusalem* and the Temple, before that Generation pass'd away, and the Dispersion of the *Jews* into all Nations: And several other

Things, which it would take up too much time now to mention, he foretold should be just in that manner in which they afterwards came to pass.

Concerning which it may be noted, that some of his Prophecies were fulfilled *soon after* they were spoken, the punctual Accomplishment whereof, was to those that both heard them spoken and saw them fulfilled, an evident Proof of his Prophetical Spirit, and a just Ground of expecting the Accomplishment of all his other Prophecies in their Season; and that others were not to be fulfilled till a *good while after*, the Accomplishment whereof at the time foretold, and long after the Predictions thereof had been recorded by the *Evangelists* was a good Evidence to those that lived then, and is also to those that live now, and either read the Accomplishment thereof in History, or see the same with our own Eyes, that he was endued with a divine Spirit; and likewise takes away all reasonable Ground of a Suspicion which we might otherwise have had, that in those Instances wherein both the Prophecy and the Accomplishment of it are related by the same Author, the Prophecies were forged after the Events were come to pass.

Now if this be true (and it is certainly true, if the Gospel History be so) that our *Saviour* did foretel many Things which afterwards happened, and those very casual and contingent Things, depending upon the free will of Men, this was an evident Token that he had a Divine Spirit; for none can certainly foretel such Things but *God* only, or those whom he enlightens with his Spirit; and therefore the Prophet *Isaiah* made this Challenge to the Idols of the *Heathens*, *Isa. 41. 23.*

Shew

Shew the things that shall be hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.

And if to this it should be objected, that future Events have been sometimes foretold, by such as have not been true Prophets of God, nor enlightned by his Spirit, as by *Diviners, Astrologers* and *Sooth-Sayers*, and by the *Oracles of the Heathens*; this may be granted without any weakning of the Argument I am now upon for the Proof of our Saviour's divine Mission.

For there may be some future Events unforeseen by us, and yet depending so entirely upon the Course of Natural Causes, that unless hindred by a Miracle, they will as certainly come to pass as the Sun will rise to morrow; and these, the *Devil*, who understands much better than we do the Power and Course of Nature, may foresee and consequently foretel; and when such a Thing is foretold, we, who understand very little of Nature, may think it a Prophecy, whereas in truth there is no more of a Propheticall Spirit in the *Devil* when he foretels such Things, than there is in a skilful *Astronomer*, when he Calculates and foretels to a Minute for several Ages to come, the Motions and Eclipses of the Sun, Moon, and Planets.

And even in future Contingencies, 'tis no wonder that the Events have sometimes verified the Predictions of the *Devil* and his *Prophets*; for this also may well enough be accounted for, without allowing that any Being hath a certain Foreknowledge of future Contingencies but God only, if we do but suppose, as we may very reasonably do, that the *Devil* hath a perfecter Knowledge than we can have, of the Counsels, Intrigues and Interests of Men, that he understands their Tempers and Inclinations, that he hath lived a great while, and made very exact Observations, that he hath had a long Experience of Things, and hath also a notable sagacity much beyond what is in any Man; for so even a wise observing and experienc'd Man, may without a Spirit of Prophecy, see much further before him than Men commonly do, and may foretel, by a Guess that shall rarely fail, a great many things which a less thinking and experienc'd Man would never have thought of; and when the thing happens that was foretold, it may be

past the Skill of others to judge, whether it was foretold by a Sagacious Guess, or by a certain Foreknowledge of what would be.

And that the Predictions of *Diviners*, and the *Oracles* of the *Heathens* concerning future *Contingencies*, have been no more than only probable Conjectures (unless when they have been borrowed from divine Prophecies, as they may have often been) is evident by their uncertain Accomplishment: Some Things indeed have happen'd as they have been foretold, but others have not so happen'd; and because the Devil could not always certainly tell what the Events of those Things would be which he was Consulted with about, he commonly gave out his *Oracles* in *ambiguous Expressions*, that so, whatever happen'd he might be thought to have foretold it. And when the Predictions of any Person pretending to Prophecy, have fail'd in some Instances, tho' in others they have been accomplish'd, this is a certain Argument that he did not Prophecy by a divine Spirit; according to what is said, *Deut. 18. 21, 22. If thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the Name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously.* In which words it seems to be implied (tho' it be not expressly said) that if the Thing foretold did come to pass, and especially that if of many Things which the Prophet had foretold, and which could not be fore-known by the greatest Skill in Natural Causes (such as are the Actions of a free Agent) not one thing fail'd, but his Words were made good by the Event in every particular, they might then depend upon it that he was a true Prophet; except only in one Case mentioned in *Deut. 13. 1, 2, 3. viz.* When he made use of that Credit which the Accomplishment of his Predictions had gain'd him, to draw Men from the Worship of the true and only God, to the Worship of Idols. And accordingly 'tis observ'd in *1 Sam. 3. 19, 20.* that because the Lord did let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground, all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that he was established to be a Prophet of the Lord.

The

The before-named Exception having therefore no Place
 our *Saviour*, for his Doctrine was, *Thou shalt worship the
 rd thy God, and him only shalt thou serve, Matth. 4. 10.*
 and there being not one of those many Predictions that he
 ve forth (tho' several of them were concerning the most
 ual Events that could be) which has not been in its due
 ne fulfilled, we may safely conclude that he was a true *Pro-*
phet of God, and consequently, that he ought to be hearken'd
 in every thing that he said.

5. Another *Testimony* that was given by *God* to the *divine*
Mission of our *Saviour*, was by the *Power* of working *Mi-*
acles, more and greater *Miracles* than ever had been done be-
 re since the beginning of the World, the Relation of which
 takes up a great part of the *Gospel History*.

And to these our *Saviour* himself fre-
 quently appeals, as to a most evident Proof

Mat. 11. 4, 5.

that he was sent by *God*, and that he was

John 10. 25,

the Son of that *God*; *John 5. 36. The*

37, 38, 14. 11.

Works which the Father hath given me to

15. 24.

do, I witness, the same Works that I do bear witness

in me that the Father hath sent me.

And indeed what better Evidence can be desir'd that a Per-
 son speaking in the Name of *God* is sent by him, than to see
 him do the Works of *God*, that is, such Works as cannot be
 done but by the Power of *God*? And that our *Saviour's* *Mi-*
acles were such, cannot, I think, be doubted by those who
 believe they are truly related in the *Gospel*, which it is now
 supposed they are.

And if to this it be said, that the first Opposers of Christi-
 anity, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, who either saw the *Miracles*
 of our *Saviour*, or had such good Assurance thereof from Eye-
 witnesses, or credible History, that they could not deny them,
 yet were not thereby convinc'd that he was a *Prophet* of *God*,
 but rather thought that he did all his mighty Works by *Ma-*
gick Art, and by the Help of the *Devil*; I answer,

1. That 'tis a Thing which we cannot be sure of, that the
 true Reason why any of those who saw our *Saviour's* *Mira-*
cles, or were persuad'd of the Truth of them, did yet refuse

to

to receive him as a *Prophet* sent from God; was because they were not convinc'd that his Miracles were done by a divine Power; for Men do not always act according to their Judgments; for we read of some of the Chief Rulers in *Job. 12. 42* that they *believed on him*, that is, they were convinc'd in their Judgments, by the mighty Works that he did, that he was the Person he pretended to be, *but they did not confess him lest they should be put out of the Synagogue; for they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God.* And therefore think it most probable, that they who attributed those Miracles of his which they could not deny, to the working of the *Devil*, did not, nay could not believe what they said, but only said it, because they were resolv'd never to receive a Doctrine (whatever Evidence was given of the Truth of it) that was so contrary as our *Saviour's* was, to their Prejudices, Lusts, and worldly Interests; and they could not tell what else to say to justify themselves to the World. But,

2. If their Blasphemy in ascribing our *Saviour's* Miracles to the power of the *Devil*, was not merely malicious, 'twas, however, most evidently groundless. For,

(1.) Tho' the *Devil* be without doubt of much greater Power than we are, and, understanding better than we do the Force of Natural Causes, can do many Things which to the Eyes of Men may appear miraculous, because it may be past their Skill to give an Account of them by Natural Causes, there is no reason however to believe that he can do a true Miracle; that is, that he can ever alter the Course of Nature or produce any Effect but by the means of Natural Causes working in such a manner, and by such Laws and Rules as God hath appointed: And therefore the Apostle calls those strange Appearances which are done by the *working of Satan* *Lying Wonders*, 2 *Thef. 2. 9.*

But they were not *Lying Wonders* which were done by our *Saviour*; they did not only seem to be done, but were done, and they were Miracles not only in appearance but in truth, being many of them such Effects as were evidently above and beyond the Power of Nature, and therefore such as could not be done but by a Power superior to Nature, that is, by God.

For who, but he only who at first brought all things out of nothing, could with five Loaves, and two small Fishes, satisfy the Hunger of more than five thousand Persons, leaving a remainder of more than twice the number of baskets-full of Fragments, that there had been of Loaves at the first? Or who could restore Life a dead Carcass that began to putrefie, but he only who at first form'd it out of the dust of the Ground? Who could call back the departed Soul, and fix it to its former Residence, but he only to whose Hands it was return'd, and who first breathed into our Bodies these Immortal Spirits?

And as to some other of his Works which may be thought to be such as might be produc'd by the working of Nature only, the manner in which they were done, plainly shews that they also were done by a Power superior to Nature; for as, for example, a sick Man may be restored to perfect Health, in time, and by degrees, by the use of proper Medicines, and such a Cure we reckon Natural; But those were plainly Super-natural Cures which were wrought, as our Saviour's for the most part were, without the use of any Medicines, only by a Word speaking, and many times at a great distance; and by which those who had been long Sick or Infirm, or Cripples, were restor'd to perfect Health and Strength in an instant of time. To suppose therefore that the Devil can thus at his Will alter the Course of Nature, is to attribute to him such a Power as is peculiar to the God of Nature, who only doth great Wonders, Psal. 72. 18. 136. 4. But,

(2.) If the Miracles of our Saviour had been only such as we might reasonably think did not exceed the Devil's Power to do, yet that they were not wrought by his Help, and consequently that they were done by the Power of God, is abundantly evident from the Design of them; which was to establish a Doctrine the most contrary that could be to the Devil's Interest. For to this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil, 1 John 3. 8. and he did it, by preaching to Men to turn from the vanities

Matth. 14.

Mark 6.

Luke 9.

John 6.

Luke 7. 11,

&c. John

11. 39, &c.

of

of Idols to the worship and service of the Living God, who made Heaven and Earth, Acts 14. 15. and by teaching them to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live Soberly, Righteously and Godly in this present World. Tit. 2. 12.

Now the Devil is certainly as subtle as he is powerfu', and therefore if he has indeed any power to alter the course of Nature and to do a real Miracle, he would not, however, we may be sure, make use of this Power against himself, he would not thereby assist another to destroy his own Kingdom. And by this Argument our Saviour himself clearly confuted this Calumny, in *Matth. xii. 25.* When the Pharisees had said that he cast out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils; he answer'd, Every Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation——and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his Kingdom stand And,

(3.) Lastly, As it is not credible that the Devil has such power; or if he has, and was let alone to himself, that he would make use of this power to destroy his own Kingdom so neither is it credible that Almighty God, who has all power in his Hands, and can controul and limit the workings of the Devil and all created Beings as he pleases, would ever permit the Devil to out-do himself in such wonderful Operations; that more and greater Miracles should be done by an Impostor than ever had been done before by any true Prophet; which yet is manifestly the Case, if indeed our Saviour was an Impostor.

He suffer'd indeed *Jannes and Jambres* to withstand his Servants *Moses and Aaron* for some time, and to do, or seem to do some wonderful Works like to theirs, *1 Tim. 3. 8.* for *Aaron cast his Rod upon the Ground and it became a Serpent* and so did they, *Exod. 7. 10, 12.* And *Aaron stretched out his hand over the Waters, and the Frogs came up and covered the Land; and the Magicians did so with their Incantments and brought up Frogs upon the Land of Egypt*, *Exod. 8. 6, 7.* But tho' he suffer'd the Magicians thus to contend with his Prophets, the Victory was clearly on his Prophet's side; for *Aaron's Rod swallowed up their Rods*, *Exod. 7. 12. 8, 18.*

and when the Magicians endeavour'd by their Inchantments to bring forth Lice, as *Aaron* had done, they could not; but were forc'd to own before *Pharaoh* that it was the Finger of God; and from that time forward strove no more for Victory.

And thus it may be consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of God, at any time, in order prove his People, and to know whether they love the Lord with all their Heart, Deut. 10. 1. &c. to suffer the Sign or Wonder foretold by an *Inticer* to Idolatry to come to pass, Matth. 24. 24. and to distinguish his Elect from Reprobates, to permit false Christs and false Prophets, to shew great Signs and Wonders, 2 Thes. 2. 8, 9, 10. and in just Judgment upon such as will not receive the love of the Truth that they may be saved; to let them alone to be deceived by that wicked one, whose Coming is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs and Lying Wonders, and with all Deceivableness of Unrighteousness in them that perish. But it cannot, I think, be reconciled to these Attributes of God, that he should permit greater Wonders, and more clear and undoubted Miracles to be done by a false Prophet, than ever were done by any true Prophet; because this would be too great a Trial for Humane Nature; such Signs and Wonders would be sufficient to deceive even those that enquire after Truth with the greatest Sincerity of Heart. And I cannot conceive it consistent with the Goodness of God, to permit that such as are of honest Minds, and sincere Lovers of Truth, should, after a fair Examination of the Proofs on both sides, have greater reason to embrace Error than Truth; which yet they plainly have in case the Miracles done by false Prophets be more and greater than have been done by any true Prophet, unless the Falseness of the Doctrines which they would thereby establish be more evident than the Truth of their Miracles. So that upon the whole, I think we may well conclude this Head, with those Words of *Nicodemus* to our Saviour, John 3. 2. *We know* (we are assured of it, we have no reason to doubt of it) *that thou art a Teacher come from God, for no Man can do these Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

6. Another

6. Another way by which God himself bare Witness to the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony, was by Raising him from the dead. (*John* 2. 19. *Matth.* 12. 40. 16. 4.) This great Miracle he himself often referred those that had any doubt of the Truth of his other Miracles, as what could not but be satisfactory to all that were capable of receiving Satisfaction. And this was the chief Subject of the Apostle's Sermons, (*Acts* 2. 24. 32. 3. 15. 4. 10. 10, 40. 13. 30. the main Proof that they insisted upon to convince Men that *Jesus* was the *Christ*: And they seem to have no doubt upon them, that if they could but persuade Men of the Truth of his Resurrection, they would readily own that he was the *Christ*, and without further scruple receive every thing that he had taught them in the Name of God as a divine Truth. *By this*, say they, *God has given Assurance unto all Men that he has ordain'd him to be the Judge of the World*, *Acts* 17. 30. *By this*, say they, *he was declared to be the Son of God with Power*, *Rom.* 1. 4. because it was a thing evident to all, that no Power less than God's could raise the dead.

When therefore this was done, (and it was done if the *Gospel-History* be true) this was a plain Seal set by God himself to our Saviour's Testimony; a Seal not possible to be counterfeited, and wherein the divine Power is so clearly and deeply engraven, that whoever looks attently upon it, must be satisfied whose Seal it is. So that to grant the Resurrection of our Saviour, and yet to doubt whether he was the Person he gave out himself to be, is to doubt of the Truth of God himself; for granting our Saviour's Resurrection, it cannot be supposed that he was an Impostor, without supposing that God himself did consent to the Imposture, and work the most evident Miracle that ever was done, on purpose to persuade Men to believe a Lye.

I shall mention at present but one way more whereby God was pleas'd to confirm our Saviour's Testimony of himself. And that was——

7. By the Witness of the *Holy Ghost*, which witness was given to him at his Baptism, when the *Holy Ghost* descended in a visible manner as a Dove and rested on him, *Joh.* 1. 32, &c.

was also given to him during the whole Course of his Ministry; for the Holy Ghost not only descended, but abode upon him; and therefore St. Peter, speaking of him, says *at God anointed him with the Holy Ghost, and with Power* Acts 10. 38, &c.

But that Witness of the Holy Ghost which I now chiefly sign, was that which was given to him after his Ascension to Heaven, and was an evident Token that all power in Heaven and Earth was then committed to him; I mean those Gifts of the Holy Ghost which he showed down on his Apostles on the Day of Pentecost; 'When being met together, there came suddenly a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty Wind, which filled all the House where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them Cloven Tongues like as of Fire, which sat upon each of them; whereupon they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other Tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' Acts 2. 1, &c.

And this Testimony of the Holy Ghost our Saviour promised before should be given to him; *John. xv. 26. When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:* And the Testimony indeed was very plain and full; for by this it is clearly appear'd that all his former Miracles had been true, and had been wrought by a divine Power, when even after he had left this World, he was still able to make good this Promise to his Disciples, and empower them to do greater Works in his Name, than he himself had done while he was living upon Earth; This was a clear Demonstration that he was the Beloved Son of the Father, and was, as St. Peter says, *exalted at God's right hand,* Acts 2. 23. when he did shed forth that wonderful Power upon his Apostles, of which all that then dwelt in Jerusalem, had come thither from all parts of the world to worship, were Eye and Ear-witnesses.

And this Testimony of the Holy Ghost was given to our Saviour, not at that time only, not one Day and no more, it was continu'd to be given to him all the time of the Apostles

files Preaching, who were also enabled to communicate others by laying on of hands *Act. 2. 38. 8. 17. 10. 44. 6.* the same Miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost which they themselves had received) until they had finished their Ministry, and planted Christian Churches in all the Countries of the then known world.

Thus I have briefly mention'd the great Evidence that the Gospel History affords of the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony of himself; the matters of Fact I have taken for granted, as being parts of the Gospel-History; the Truth which has been, I hope, already sufficiently prov'd; and the Evidence it self is so clear and full, that I thought it needless to open it in more words than I have done; for that Testimony which God did by all these ways give to our Saviour, is a rational inducement to believe the Truth of what he said concerning himself, is what I think, cannot be doubted by those that allow themselves any time to consider things.

This I'm sure I may say, that if this strong Evidence that the Gospel-History affords of our Saviour's divine Mission is not sufficient to prove it, there never yet has been sufficient Evidence of the Truth of any divine Revelation; I had almost said, nor ever can be, but that I know it is not for us to say, what infinite Power and Wisdom can do.

But as some *Jews* in our Saviour's time said, *when Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these which this Man has done?* *Job. 7. 31.* So I may ask, and I believe it will be very difficult to make answer to it, when Christ cometh (if indeed he be not already come, if indeed that Jesus on whom we believe be not he) how shall we do to know him? What greater Assurance can he give us that he is the Christ, than Jesus hath given? What better Reason can we ever have to believe any Messenger that shall be sent from God, than we have to believe our Saviour?

For we have as much Reason (supposing the Gospel-History to be true) to believe him to be sent from God, as we have to believe any thing; we are as secure that we are not deceiv'd in him, as we are that we are not deceiv'd in

plain

plainest Matters of sense. For the best, the only security that we have that our Senses do not deceive us, and that every thing in the World is not quite otherwise than it appears to be, is the Goodness of God; and this same security we have that we are not deceiv'd in our Saviour's divine Mission. Nay, we are more secure of this than we are of that; because it is more plainly inconsistent with the Goodness of God, to deceive us in a matter on which our everlasting Welfare depends, than in matters only of this Life, which are the chief Things for which our bodily Senses are of use to us? And if indeed we are deceiv'd in our Saviour, it must be said that God himself has deceiv'd us, having giving us all the Reason imaginable to believe him to be, as he said he was, the Son of God.

And now having been so large in shewing the Evidence that there is from the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the History of the *New Testament*, that our Saviour himself was a *Teacher sent from God*, I shall not need to spend much time in shewing that his Apostles were likewise Commission'd by God to instruct the World; and consequently that we ought also to receive all the Doctrines taught by them (whether in their *Epistles*, or in their *Discourses*, interwoven by St. *Luke* with his History of their *Acts*) as true and divine; for—

1. There is plainly no Reason why we should not receive them as such; because they are the very same that our Saviour taught, and no other. Some Points of Christian doctrine are indeed more largely explain'd and handled by the Apostles in their Epistles, than they are in those Discourses of our Saviour that are recorded by the *Evangelists*; but between the Doctrines taught by our Lord himself, and those taught by the Apostles, there is such a perfect Harmony and agreement, that if we had only their own Word for it, that they spake and wrote by the Inspiration of the Spirit, we might securely believe them; for tho' one Man may, without Inspiration, say the same thing which another before him has spoken by Inspiration; yet if the second says that he also is inspir'd, there can be no hurt, tho' there may be a mistake

in believing him ; seeing whether the Man was inspir'd or no, 'tis certain that the *Doctrine* was. But,

2. If there be any *Doctrines* taught by the *Apostles*, which we do not see were taught before by our *Saviour*, I say there is however from the History of the Gospel, Evidence enough of their divine Mission also ; so that we may very securely take upon their Credit, as true and divine, any *Doctrine* which they have instructed us in. For,

(1.) That they were sent by our *Saviour*, is past all Dispute, if the Gospel History be true ; *John 20. 21. As my Father hath sent me, so send I you ;* and again, *Mattb. 28. 19, 20. Go ye and disciple all Nations, Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* And that he had Authority to grant them such a Commission, he shews in the words before ; *All Power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth ; Go ye therefore and teach all Nations, &c.* And,

(2.) That they were taught by God, and enlightened by his *Holy Spirit*, is what can't be doubted, if we believe the power of our Saviour, and the Truth of the Gospel ; for before our Lord went from them, *he breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; John 20, 22.* And to what Purpose the Holy Ghost was to be given them, he had told them before ; *The Comforter which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my Name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your Remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you, John 14. 26.* And, *when he, the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all Truth, John 16. 13.* Being thus therefore taught by the Spirit of Truth, our Saviour might well say as he does, *Luke 10. 16. He that heareth you heareth me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* And,

(3.) Lastly ; We have all the reason in the World to receive them as Messengers from God, and to believe that what they have taught is the Will of God, because they have the same *Attestation* of God to the Truth of their *Doctrine*

that our Saviour himself had to his. I do not mean that God did bear them Witness all those ways by which he bare Witness to our Saviour, for that could not be; but he bare witness to them all those ways by which it was proper for him to do it, and by which he had born witness to any former Prophets.

For he bare witness to them that they were sent by him, by the Testimony of our Saviour, as he had done to our Saviour by the Testimony of *John*. (*John* 13. 22. 20. 21.) And if the Testimony of a Prophet was credible concerning our Saviour, much more is the Testimony of the Son of God highly credible concerning a Messenger sent by him.

He bare witness to them also by enduing them with the Gift of Prophecy; for *when the Spirit of Truth is come*, says our Saviour, *he will shew you Things to come*, *John* 16. 13.

And lastly, he bare witness to them, by that which is the most plain and sensible proof of a divine Mission, *viz.* By the Power of Miracles, and manifold Gifts of the Holy Ghost. *The Lord worked with them, and confirmed their word with Signs following*, says *St. Mark* 16. 20. And, *with great power*, says *St. Luke*, *gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, *Acts* 4. 33. And the greater part of the *History of the Acts of the Apostles* is spent in relating the wonderful Works that they did, by the Name of *Jesus*, and the Power of the *Holy Ghost*, in confirmation of the Truth of their *Doctrine*.

But *St. Paul* (perhaps it will be said) of whose Writings are most of the Epistles, was not one of them, not called by our Saviour to be an Apostle as they were, nor so much as an Eye and Ear-witness of our Lord's Miracles and Doctrine; what Reason then have we to receive his Writings as Portions of Holy Scripture?

I answer, as good, tho' not in every particular just the same that we have to receive the Writings of the other Apostles as such.

For he was Converted, and Ordain'd to be an Apostle, in more wonderful manner than they were; as you may see *Acts* 9.

And as our Lord himself gave witness to their Divine Mission, so he did also to his; *Acts* 9. 15. *He is, says our Lord, a chosen Vessel unto me, to bear my Name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the Children of Israel.*

To Him also as well as to Them, the Spirit foreshew'd Things to come; several Proofs of which we may observe in the History of the *Acts*, and in his *Epistles*. (*Acts* 20. 22, 25. 27. 10, 22. 2 *Thes.* 2. 3, &c. 1 *Tim.* 4. 1, &c. 2 *Tim.* 3. 1, &c.

And Lastly; His *Speech and his Preaching was*, as *Theirs*, in *Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power*. (1 *Cor.* 2. 4. 2 *Cor.* 12. 12.) In Him all the Signs of an Apostle were seen, no less than in them, viz. *Signs and Wonders, and mighty Deeds*. And of Him, with *Barnabas* in Company, it is that *St. Luke* speaks, when he says, that *the Lord gave Testimony to the word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by their Hands*. (*Acts* 14. 3.) And the latter part of the History of the *Acts*, from the 10th Chapter to the End, contains little else but an account of *St. Paul's* Preaching, and of the Miracles that were done by the Power of God to confirm the Truth of his Doctrine; So that if we believe the Gospel-History, we can no more doubt of his divine Mission and Inspiration than we can of theirs; we must conclude, that if they were Apostles, so was he; that if they were *Ministers of Christ*, (2 *Cor.* 11. 23.) so was he too; forasmuch as in nothing he was *behind the very chiefest Apostles*; (2 *Cor.* 11. 5. 2 *Cor.* 12. 11.) so that consequently we have as much Reason to believe his Writings to be Inspired, as we have theirs.

And now by all that hath been said, I hope, I have fully made good the Point I was to prove; viz. That if the Matters of Fact recorded in the New Testament are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught, whether by Christ himself or by his Apostles. For if it be true that they were sent by God to instruct the World, and to declare the Will of God to Mankind; (and that they were, is sufficiently prov'd by their Credential Letters, which we have now perus'd and examin'd) we can no more doubt the truth of those things which they, as the

Messengers and Ambassadors of God have deliver'd to us in his Name, than if we had heard God himself uttering the same by a Voice from Heaven. So that I cannot but perswade my self that the Proofs which have been offer'd in the foregoing Discourse of the Truth of all the Doctrines that are taught in the New Testament, are sufficient to convince any Rational and Considering Man of the Truth of any Doctrine, the Falsity whereof is not Notorious and Self-evident.

And therefore this, I think, is the only thing that can with any shew of Reason be pretended by any Person to justify his not receiving the Gospel as a divine Revelation, viz. That the Matter of it, in some Particulars, is such as will not admit of any Proof at all; because no Arguments can make a thing credible, which in it self is incredible. And such, it may be pretended, some of the Christian Doctrines are which are taught in the New Testament; and especially the Doctrine of the Trinity.

And that this Doctrine is clearly taught in the New Testament, we freely grant. But why should it be deem'd incredible? Does it imply a Contradiction? Can they that except against it, or against the Gospel-Revelation upon the Account of it, shew that it is impossible it should be true? Can they demonstrate that 'tis impossible for an Infinite and Eternal Being to beget a Son in his own Likeness, *the brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person?* (*Heb. 1. 3.*) Or can they shew it to be impossible that there should be a Third Person proceeding from both these?

No, perhaps they'll say; But that these three should be one, as the Scripture teaches, that, they think, exceeds all the Measures of Belief; that, they can't but think a manifest Contradiction.

But why so? Do the Christians hold, or does the Scripture say, that they are three and one in the same respect? does it say that the one God is three Gods; or that those three whom it speaks of as three distinct Persons, ascribing personal Acts to each of them, are nevertheless but one single Person? No, it only tell us in general that these three are One. But how they are Three, or how they are One; wherein consists their Distinction, and wherein their Unity, it says not, at least not very

plainly. And I think it the safest Course in such high Matters in *Matters* so much too high for us, not to exercise our selves. (*Psal.* 131. 1. nor to pretend to be Wise above what is written.

If therefore there be no Contradiction in the Doctrine of a Trinity in Unity ; (as there is not unless we say that God is One and Three in the same Respect) that's enough ; that's all that needs to be said upon this Occasion. For tho' we may (as indeed we must) allow it to be an incomprehensible Mystery, there is no reason to Cavil at the Gospel-Revelation, or to deny it to be a true divine Revelation upon this Account.

For we live in a World of Mysteries ; we must believe Mysteries in abundance whether we will or no ; I mean, there are some Truths so very plain even to our Reason that we can't doubt of them, and yet so very high and Mystrious, that we can no more fathom them than we can the Doctrine of the Trinity.

For thus, that Matter is not Eternal, we are as sure almost as we are of any thing, for Matter could not exist of it self ; and yet how Matter should be made out of nothing, is as incomprehensible by us, as 'tis how the One undivided Godhead does personally subsist in the Father, Son and Holy-Ghost.

And thus again, that God is Eternal we are certain by Reason ; (for by God we mean the first Cause of all, and he who was first could have none before him) and yet that any thing should exist without a Cause of its Existence is unaccountable ; and if we were not sure that it must be so, we should be ready to say that it was impossible, and a manifest Contradiction that it should be so.

Thus, I say, we are led by the Light of Reason only to a firm belief of some Truths, which yet we can give no Account of by our Reason ; and I think, 'tis very hard that we will not receive an incomprehensible Doctrine, upon the Credit of a very plain and well attested Divine Revelation, as well as we do and must do the same upon the Evidence of Natural Reason.

Especially considering the Subject of this incomprehensible Doctrine, which is the Essence or Substance of God, who is an Infinite Being and so must needs be incomprehensible by our finite Understandings ; by our Understandings, I say, which

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are so very shallow, that I believe I may truly say, we understand not the Essence or Substance of any thing. For we understand not what is the Essence or Substance of Matter or Body, tho' it be a thing that all our Senses are continually exercised about; all that we know of it, is some Properties or Accidents thereof; that it is something (but what we know not) that has Figure and Dimensions, that is hard, soft, fix'd, fluid or the like. And we understand no more, but rather less, what the Essence or Substance of our Soul is; all that we know of it, is, that 'tis something that thinks, and because it thinks we know it must be something; and because none of those Properties which we observe in Matter, have any Relation at all to Thought, we conclude that the thinking Soul is an immaterial Something; tho' what is immaterial cannot be explain'd by us, unless we could say what is material.

Seeing therefore (as the Wise *Hebrew* speaks) *we do hardly guess aright at things that are upon Earth, and with Labour do find out the things that are before us; (Wisd. 9. 16.)* is it any wonder that we cannot search out, and fully know and comprehend the things that are in Heaven? If we are not able to understand even our own Essence, and how by an ineffable Union of Spirit with Matter, the whole together becomes one Man; is it any Wonder, that by all our *Searching we cannot find out God, that we cannot find out the Almighty unto Perfection? (Job 11. 7.)*

And whot hath been thus briefly said, is, I hope, sufficient to shew that a Divine Revelation cannot reasonably be excepted against or refused, only upon the Account of some Myste-rious and Incomprehensible Doctrines that are therein contain'd. And if not, then, I hope, what was said before is enough to satisfy any considering Man, that the Gospel is a true Divine Revelation.

To Conclude all therefore; having Christ and his Apostles continually Preaching to us in the Books of the New Testament. 'Let us (as the Text says, *Jam. 1. 21, 22.*) hear them; Let us Reverence these Sacred Writings as the Oracles of God, and receive with Meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our Souls. But let us be Doers of the Word, and not

Hearers only deceiving our own selves. For, (as the Apostle argues, *Heb. 2. 3, &c.*) If the word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience receiv'd a just Recompence of Reward ; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy-Ghost, according to his own Will ?

No Reason to desire New REVELATIONS

The SEVENTH SERMON

St. LUKE xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham : But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

WHEN I first began to Discourse on these Words ; I propos'd to speak to these three Points.

I. To shew that the present Standing Revelation of God's Will, contain'd in the Books of the Old and New Testament, is abundantly sufficient to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets ;* (I add, *they have also Christ and his Apostles ;*) *let them hear them.*

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith,

faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Mo-
 tives to Repentance, it is an unreasonable Request to desire
 more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from
 the dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, To shew that in case God should condescend
 to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every
 day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased
 friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State,
 and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that
 very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not
 brought to Repentance, by the Preaching and Standing Reve-
 lation of the Gospel, would be persuaded by this means. *If they
 hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles)
 neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

The first of these has been the subject of several former Di-
 courses ; the second I design to speak to at this time ; viz.

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of
 faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Mo-
 tives to Repentance, as I have shewn we have, in that Stand-
 ing Revelation of God's Will which is contained in the Holy
 scripture, it is an unreasonable Request to desire more. *Nay,
 Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead,
 they will repent.*

And the Unreasonableness of the Request which the Rich
 Man here makes in the behalf of his Brethren ; viz. That God
 would be pleased to send one from the dead to preach to them ;
 in general, how unreasonable it is for men now a-days to de-
 sire, or look for more means of Conversion, or Motives to Re-
 pentance, than God has been pleased to afford us in the Stand-
 ing Revelation of the Gospel, will appear, if we consider
 these following things.

1. That the Principles of Faith and the Motives to Repen-
 tance which we have already, being well grounded upon
 Matters of Fact, which have been once already sufficiently
 prov'd and attested, 'tis altogether needless that any fresh or
 further Proof should be given of them ; and 'tis what we never
 think reasonable to desire in other the like Cases.

That when God requires us to believe or do any thing, and
 sends

sends a special Messenger to acquaint us with his Will, should grant to this Messenger such Testimonials, as are sufficient to satisfy reasonable Men that he is no Impostor, but a Teacher sent from God, is indeed a thing that may fairly be expected. And if God should not do thus, we should be excusable in not hearkning to such a Messenger, because we could not know whether he was a true or a false Prophet; and God does not require, neither indeed is it reasonable that we should believe every Pretender to Revelation. And the clearest Proof of any Man's being sent from God to teach us any thing, being a Power of doing such Miracles and Mighty Works, are manifestly above the skill and strength of a Man to do, was therefore highly requisite, and what might reasonably be look'd for, that God should grant such a Power as this to those whom he has ever inspired with new Light, and Commission'd to make any new Revelation of his Will to Mankind. And this he has always done.

He gave this Power to *Moses* in a large measure, because the Matters that Men were to trust him for, were many, and very considerable.

He gave it also to some of the succeeding Prophets, but in a less measure because their Business, for the most part, was only to Interpret, or to press the Observation of the Law of *Moses*, which had been sufficiently prov'd before.

And he gave it in the largest measure of all to our Saviour and his Apostles: because the Revelation made by them was of Truths very mysterious, some of them above the Reach and Comprehension of Humane Reason; It was also a Revelation in a manner wholly new, even to the *Jews* themselves, and much more to the *Gentiles*. And besides, it was a Revelation in many Points, to appearance, contrary to a former Divine Revelation; inasmuch as it ordered the Abolition of many things which had been before enjoyned by divine Authority viz. all the Ritual and Ceremonial Law of *Moses*. And therefore to gain Credit to their Testimony, that they were inspired and sent by God to teach such things, it was very requisite that they should produce more, and more plain and undeniable Testimonials of their divine Mission, than *Moses* himse

Will, and done. And such Testimonials they had, such they did produce, working more Miracles, and those as I may say, more wonderful and Miraculous, than *Moses* and all the *Prophets* together had wrought before.

But when these Testimonials had been once fairly produced, and examined, and by all reasonable Men allowed to be true and sufficient; and when Christ and his Apostles had made and published all that Revelation which they were Committed to make; And when to prevent all misunderstandings of or mistakes concerning it, they had committed it all to Writing; and the Men that lived in those times, and were capable enquiring into the Truth of it, were well assured that the Books said to be written by the Apostles and Evangelists, were indeed theirs, and contain'd in substance all the same things, and no other, which they had before declared by word of mouth, and confirmed by Miracles; After this, I say, when the Divinity of the Revelation was thus once, at the first Publishing of it, so fully confirmed, there was no need that it should be proved any more, and all other Proof thereof would have been superfluous; because the whole Matter, both Doctrine and Proof, being once faithfully recorded, and those Records well attested, there could afterwards be no reasonable cause to call it again in Question. So that the Reason of working Miracles being then ceased, it was reasonable that the Power of working Miracles should cease too; at least till such time as he should think fit, to make some Alteration in, or Addition to his former Revelations; (which we have good Reason to think he will never do) or till he should please to undertake the Conversion of those Nations to the Christian Faith, to whom the Knowledge of the former Miracles that had been wrought for its Confirmation could not be so well communicated by credible History as it is to us.

For (as was hinted before) Credible History is all the Proof and Evidence that we ever think reasonable to require in other Cases of the like Nature.

As for instance; When a new Law is made concerning any Matter; it is requisite, according to the Custom of our Country, that it should pass both *Houses of Parliament*, and that the

King

King should ratifie and confirm it; and that afterwards should be some way so published and promulged, that all Subjects that are then alive should have sufficient Assurance given them that such a Law is made. But after this Law has been once so passed, and ratified and promulged, it is passed and ratified and promulged for ever; and no Man is so unreasonable as to expect that every Parliament that is called afterwards, should read and pass over again all the Laws that have been made before their Time; or that every *King* that succeeds to the Throne should afresh ratifie and publish all the Laws that were made by all his Predecessors. But all the Proof that we ever require of the Authority of any ancient Law, is a true Copy of it, and a good History or Record of its being made at such a time, by such a King, confirmed by the Tradition of all the intermediate Ages to our Time, which has allowed of its Authority, by citing it as a Law of the Land, Pleading from it, and by giving Judgment according to it.

And he who will not allow of the same Proof and Evidence of the Authority of the Christian Institution so many hundred years ago established, but would needs have new Miracles and new Revelations to confirm the former, is every way as unreasonable as that Criminal would be, who being indicted upon some ancient Statute, should refuse to plead his Indictment, upon pretence that he knew not whether there was any such Law or not; it being made (if ever it was made) long before his time, and there being none now alive that were present at the making of it. Shew him the Law in the *Statute-Book*; why, how does he know, he says, but that the Printers had a mind to put a Cheat upon the Nation, by Printing a Law of their own making, as a Law made by some of our ancient Kings; nay shew him the Original Record, still he'd say, There have been abundance of Forgeries in the World, and how does he know but that this one? The Record he'd own perhaps, looks like an Ancient Deed, and has all the Marks of such Antiquity as it pretends to; but after all, 'tis possible it may be, and therefore he cannot be sure it is not a Forgery; and 'till he is assured of that he will not plead to an Indictment that is grounded upon

wards that if the King and Parliament that now are, will be pleased to declare that this is a good Law, and if he himself may be allowed to be by when they shall declare it; or if at least two or three Witnesses that he can trust shall testify upon Oath, that they were present when it was passed into a Law, then he will allow it to be a good Law; and after that, will be content to suffer the Punishment of it, if he shall ever again be a Transgressor.

Now what Man is there that would think this a reasonable Demand? Or what Judge, or Court would ever allow of such a Plea? And yet, as unreasonable as it is, it is just the same with theirs, who, pretending to be more wise and cautious than their Neighbours, will not allow of the same sort of Proof (tho' indeed much better in its kind) of the Truth of the Christian Religion; but tho' we have as *Authentick Histories* as any are in the World, (such Histories as the greatest Adversaries of Christianity have not been able to say any thing to invalidate the Truth of) which declare that Christ and his Apostles taught such and such Doctrines, and wrought such and such Miracles to confirm the Truth of their Doctrine, yet will not believe that the Doctrine of Christianity is true and divine, unless they may have special Messengers sent to them to declare a-fresh all the same things which the Apostles once did; and those endued with a Power of working in their sight and presence the same Miracles over again, that are said to have been formerly done by Christ and his Apostles, to confirm the Testimony that they gave.

2. The *Unreasonableness* of that Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the Behalf of his Brethren, viz. That God would make a new Revelation for their particular Conversion; or, in general, The *Unreasonableness* of our now *desiring fresh Revelations; new Miracles or Apparitions* of Men from the dead, to confirm the Truth of those things which are already sufficiently proved to us by the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, will further appear, if we consider; that to us who live now in Christian Countries, other Grounds of Faith or stronger Motives to Repentance than we have already in the standing Revelation of the Gospel might be

be inconsistent with the Excellency of Faith, might destroy the Virtue of Believing, and might be too great a Force and Constraint upon us, such as would in a manner take away our Liberty of Choice.

For there is no Virtue at all in Believing what we see; there is no Praise or Thanks at all due for doing what we are driven or forced to do; and for us, who have already abundant sufficient Grounds to believe and embrace Christianity, to have fresh Miracles wrought every day before our own eyes (such Miracles as we could not possibly doubt the Truth of) to confirm those Doctrines which are already sufficiently confirmed would not be to persuade us, but to force us to be Christians; so that then the State we are now in would not be, as God designed it should be, a State of *Trial*; for the *Trial* of *Wisdome* is, when there are some Reasons on both sides; and here the Wise Man who in that Case gives Judgment on that side on which the Reasons are strongest.

But against what I have now said perhaps it may be objected, That the Evidence which we desire of the Truth of Religion is no more than we are told has been already given to some Men; particularly to those who lived in our Saviour and his Apostle's times, and we can't see why it would be more inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion now than it was then, or how it would more destroy our Freedom than it did theirs, or how it would be a greater Force upon our Choice than it was upon theirs, to have the very same Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion which they had.

But in answer to this, it may be consider'd; that as they then had some Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion which we have not, so we now have some Evidence thereof which they had not: They indeed saw with their own Eyes some of the Miracles that we wrought for the Confirmation of Christianity; but they had not, as we now have, a credible History of Record of a very great number of Miracles that were wrought for that purpose. And therefore (without considering at present which of these Evidences of the Truth of the Facts upon which our Religion is grounded, is the most convincing) thus much is plain; That if we, who have a
ready

dy very good Reason to believe them upon the Credit of a
 all attested History, were also admitted to be Eye Witnesses
 some fresh Miracles, such as we are told were then wrought,
 with these Evidence together would be stronger and more ir-
 refutable, than either of them alone ; So that consequently, if
 who have already one of these Evidences, were allowed to
 have the other also, we should have more Evidence in the
 whole than they had, our Choice consequently would not be
 free as theirs was, it would not be so much in the Power
 of our Wills to be Infidels, as it was in theirs.

True, perhaps you'll say, we should indeed in that Case
 have more Evidence than they had, but that is not the thing
 we desire ; all that we could wish for, is, the very same Evi-
 dence that they had ; and upon that Condition we could be
 well contented to want the Historical Evidence which we
 have and they had not ; for we can't but think, that the E-
 vidence that they had is much stronger than ours, and that
 they had much greater Reason to be Christians than we have.

1. The Apostles of Christ who (as 'tis said) both saw his
 Miracles, and were enabled by the Power of the Holy Ghost
 to do the like themselves, had plainly greater Reason to be-
 lieve, than even those had who heard from their mouths the
 Testimony that they gave concerning our Lord, and saw the
 Miracles that were done by their Hands in Confirmation of
 their Testimony. And 2. They who saw with their own Eyes
 the Miracles that the Apostles wrought had more Reason to
 believe, than those had to whom they were only Reported by
 other Witnesses, and therefore much rather than we have who
 receive this Report only by a History that was written many
 hundred years ago. Now this is all that we desire, viz. To
 have Evidence upon the same Level with those who lived in the Primitive
 Times, and to have as much Reason to be Christians as they
 had ; and we can't see why this Request should be thought
 unreasonable ; we do not understand why there would not be
 as much Freedom, and consequently as great Virtue in
 Believing upon such strong Evidence as there was in
 the True Miracles.

In Answer to this therefore I will consider distinct'y the
 two
 ready

two Cases before-mentioned, and compare the same with our
 (1.) I shall consider the Case of the Apostles, who both saw
 our Lord's Miracles, and were enabled by the Power of the
 Holy Ghost to do the like themselves.

And that they had a surer Ground of Faith than any since
 or than any besides themselves ever had, I believe must be
 granted; but then 'tis to be considered on the other side.

1. That the Apostles were but few in number, only twelve
 Persons, or if we should reckon into the number, as in the
 respect, equal to the Apostles, all those that were called by our
 Saviour himself to be his Disciples, and who were very much
 tho' not so constantly in his Company as the Apostles were,
 we read but of seventy of them; or if we add to these all the
 that were convinced by our Saviours Miracles that he was the
 Christ, (*Luke 10. 1.*) and that owned themselves his Dis-
 ciples while he was upon Earth, 'tis probable that all these to-
 gether were no more than *five hundred*; viz. those *five hun-*
dred Brethren, to whom when met together in *Galilee*, our
 Lord shewed himself alive after his Passion. (*1 Cor. 15. 6.*)

2. It may be also considered, that their Case was extraor-
 dinary and peculiar, and that this Advantage of greater Evi-
 dence (as we reckon it) which they had above all others was
 no more than was necessary to qualify them for that special
 Office which they, and none but they were to be employed
 in; which was to bear Witness to the Men of that Generation
 by word of mouth, and to all future Ages by their written
 Testimony, of the Doctrines and Miracles of our Saviour;
 no Man is a proper Witness of any matter of Fact, but one
 he who was an Eye Witness thereof.

3. It may be further considered, that as they had a more
 clear and unexceptionable Evidence of the Truth of Christ's
 nity, than any besides ever had, so they had also a greater Bur-
 den laid upon them, than any Christians since have had; and
 it might be no more than necessary that the Grounds of their
 Faith should be as much surer and stronger than those
 which other Men's Faith is built, as their Duty was larger and
 more difficult than other Men's Duty is. For a weaker Foun-
 dation is as well able to support a low Building, placed in

Bottom

storm, and well sheltered from Storms, as a much stronger is
 bear a high built Tower, situated on the top of an Hill, or
 the Sea shore, and continually exposed to violent Winds
 and Tempests.

And this was the Condition of the Apostles in Comparison
 with ours. We have indeed several Temptations to resist by
 the Power of our most holy Faith, but then they are only
 such Temptations as are common to Men, and for the over-
 coming whereof a Faith grounded only upon good Historical
 Evidence is sufficient; for by the Power of such a Faith a
 great many in all Ages have happily overcome them; But the
 Apostles had Difficulties and Temptations of another sort to
 contend with; they *wrestled not only against Flesh and Blood,*
against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers
of the Darkness of this World, against Spiritual Wickedness in
high Places. It was their Business to go in an untrodden Path;
 to break the Ice and to make plain the way for all that were
 to follow; and our Work (very easie in comparison with
 theirs) is only to follow in that Way, which they have made
 plain and smooth, to that Kingdom of Heaven, into which
 they could not enter but thro' manifold Tribulations.

That the Apostles therefore had stronger and more convinc-
 ing Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion than we
 have, and such as they could not so easily resist, as we may
 see which are afforded to us, may be granted; and yet it
 may be unreasonable for us to desire the same, unless we were
 to be put to the same Trials of our Faith that they were;
 which in a Christian Country can hardly be.

And indeed as desirous as we seem to be of having such E-
 vidence of the Truth of our Religion as we are told the Apost-
 les had, I believe there are very few of us but had rather be
 contented with less Evidence, than have so much as the A-
 postles had with its appendant Burden; which was to travel
 the World over, even into the most rude and barbarous
 Countries to plant Christianity; expecting wherever they
 should meet Bonds and Afflictions, meeting every where with the
 most violent opposition and roughest Usage; encountering
 every where the greatest Dangers, and sure at last to be made a
 bloody

bloody Sacrifice to the Malice and Fury of their Persecutors. How much St. Paul alone endured (and 'tis like the Sufferings of the other Apostles were not much less) you may see in Cor. II. 23, &c. and yet he was not then come to the end of his Sufferings; In Labours abundant, in Stripes above measure, in Prison frequent, in Deaths oft; Of the Jews five times received I forty Stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with Rods, once was I Stoned, thrice I suffered Shipwrack, a Night and a Day I have been in the Deep; in Journeyings often, Perils of Waters, in Perils of Robbers, in Perils by mine own Countrymen, in Perils by the Heathen, in Perils in the City, in Perils in the Wilderness, in Perils in the Sea, in Perils among false Brethren; in Weariness and Painfulness, in Watchings often, in Hunger and Thirst, in Fastings often, in Cold and Nakedness; Besides those things that are without, which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches. Therefore he might well say, as he does, I Cor. 4. 9, &c. think that God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were pointed to Death; for we are made a Spectacle to the World and to Angels, and to Men; we are Fools for Christ's sake—we are weak—we are despised; even unto this very hour both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, have no certain dwelling Place; and labour working with Hands, being reviled—persecuted—defamed; we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-scouring of things unto this Day. It was therefore plainly necessary that a Faith which was to undergo these severe Trials, should be built upon the surest Grounds; but for us, and to enable us to overcome the World, a Faith that is founded upon less certain Evidence may be as sufficient.

(2.) The Second Case before-mentioned was of those who heard with their own Ears the Testimony which the Apostles gave concerning our Lord; and saw with their own Eyes wonderful Works that they did in Confirmation of their Testimony. We could wish at least that we had such strong Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion as they had; if we had, we see not why there would not be as much Cheer and consequently as much Virtue in our believing as there was in theirs.

But here it may be considered,

1. That it was the Lot but of very few, even of those that lived in the Apostles times, except of the *Jews* that dwelt in *Judea*, to hear the Apostles themselves, or to see with their own Eyes the Miracles that they wrought; and even of these there were but few that had the opportunity of seeing many of their mighty Works; so that all things considered the Evidence that we have of the Truth of our Religion, if it be not fully equal to, is very little inferior to that which they had; for it being (as has been formerly shewn) morally impossible that the Gospel History which is now in our Hands should be forged or spurious, or corrupted and altered, what can be thought to be wanting in the Clearness of the Evidence that we have (being given in Writing and not by word of Mouth) made up by the Fulness and Abundance of it; we having the Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, several Witnesses testifying the same Miracles, and every one of them witnessing more Miracles, than any except those who were constant Attendants upon our Lord, or Companions of the Apostles were in a Capacity to witness. But

2. Granting it to be true, that in the Apostle's times those whom the Gospel was preached, had generally clearer and stronger Evidence of the Truth of Christianity than we have now; yet I say, even that Evidence of Sense which they had was not more apt or like to convince and persuade them, than the Proof which we now have, tho' in it self it be less, is to convince and persuade us.

For when Men have already taken up an Opinion, (no matter upon what Grounds) or when by their Worldly Interest they are engaged to be of such an Opinion, it can't be expected that the same Reasons, I mean Reasons of the same strength in themselves, should be sufficient to persuade them to alter their Opinion, which would have sufficed to have fixed and establish'd them in their former Notions.

And this is plainly the Difference between those Times and ours; for when the Revelation of the Gospel was first made by Christ and his Apostles, all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were most strongly prejudiced against it; each of them having been bred

bred up in a Persuasion that their own way of Worship was right, and the *Jews* in particular having had good Assurance that their Law given by *Moses*, (to which the Doctrine of Christianity seem'd very opposite) had been of Divine Institution. But however, when a Man has been bred up in the Belief of any thing, and has believ'd it a good while, he takes it for granted that he had reason to believe it, whether he has or not; so that the Prejudice against Christianity was powerful, tho' not altogether so just, in the *Gentiles*, whose Religion was meerly fabulous, as in the *Jews*, whose Law was indeed of Divine Institution.

And besides, (which was an Impediment alike common both to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*) they could not either of them then embrace and profess the Christian Religion without apparently hazarding the Loss of all things that were dear to them in this World. And how very apt a strong Worldly Interest is to blind Mens Eyes and to byass their Judgments, what we cannot but daily observe in all other Cases.

But our Case now is quite otherwise; our Prejudices and Interest are both for Christianity; for we suck'd it in with our Mothers Milk, and we found it the establish'd Religion of our Country where we were Born; for which Reasons we believe it, or at least were strongly inclined to believe it, before we knew or had heard of any other Reasons; so that to us, we are already inclined on this side; to us, who to be sure, are not prejudiced against it; to us, whose Interest leads us to continue in the Religion we were first bred in, such Proof we always accept and allow of in other Cases of the like Nature, is Proof strong enough. And therefore much rather when we have, as indeed we have, a stronger and more controuled Tradition for the Truth of the Gospel-History than of any History in the World besides, we shall be inconsistent with our selves, if we do not allow it to be sufficient.

So that upon the whole Matter, considering the Prejudice both from Education and Interest which they lay under who lived in those Times when the Gospel was first reveal'd and preach'd; even their own Eye-sight of some of those Miracles that were then wrought to confirm it, was not more perswasive

It is that good Assurance that we now have by credible undoubted Records that such Miracles were then wrought. The Proof they had, consider'd in it self, was indeed stronger than ours; but considering our different Circumstances, that Proof was not more apt or likely to convince them, than that which we have given us is to convince and persuade us. And we had now the very same Proof and Demonstration of the Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of our Christian Religion, *viz.* The Evidence of our own Senses; this, which is but sufficient to them, might to us be such a Proof as would be, in a manner, a Force upon us; such clear Demonstration meeting with no strong Prejudice or considerable Interest on the other side, might be enough to over-power us, that we could not be *Infidels* if we would, and then there would be no Virtue in Believing.

3. The Unreasonableness of desiring more Proof of the Truth of Religion than God has been pleased to afford us by the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, and particularly of desiring that God would be pleas'd to work new Miracles for our particular satisfaction, or for the Conviction of some of our Friends that are not persuaded by the Gospel-Revelation, will further appear, if we consider the equal Right that all other Men have to desire the same, and the many Inconveniences and Absurdities that would follow, in case all Men would be gratified in this Desire.

For as to the first of these, *viz.* The equal Right that all other Men have to desire the same; What Reason can I pretend for my Infidelity, which another Man may not also as well plead for his? Have not I as good Proof of the Truth of Religion as my Neighbour has? Have not I as free Recourse to the Holy Scriptures as he? and the same Evidence of the Truth and Divine Inspiration of them that he has? And are we not also in all other Respects alike? Being Born in the same Country, and having had the same Education, and consequently being probable to have the same Inclinations towards, the same Prejudices against, or Aversion to the Christian Faith? And if so, what Reason can I plead for any extraordinary or peculiar Favour? For is not he God's Creature as

well as I ? And hath not God the same Tenderness and Regard for him that he hath for me, and consequently the same Desire of his Welfare, that I can suppose he hath of mine ? Why then should not God grant him this same Request whether in the Behalf of himself or his Friend, as well as I can expect he should grant it me ? In a word, Why may not every Man desire the same as well as I ? And why should not God grant it to all that desire it, as well as to any one ?

But now if God should do this, see what Inconveniencies and Absurdities would follow thereupon ?

One sort of Men would not believe, unless they might see *Apparitions* ; If one went unto them from the dead, they would *repent*. And so for their sakes the World must be filled with Ghosts ; the Dead must never be at Rest in their Graves, and the Souls in Bliss who once rejoiced in the thought of being for ever got clear out of a troublesome World, must be content (to gratifie these Men) to leave their Place in *Abrams Bosome*, and to be deprived of the Beatifical Vision, and of unspeakable Joys of Heaven, as long and as often as any of these unreasonable Men are pleased to desire it.

But another sort of Men it may be there are, that would not like this kind of Proof ; A transient Apparition of a Ghost they'd look upon perhaps as a thing too liable to Cheat and Imposture ; they'd therefore desire some more plain and sensible and permanent Miracles than this ; some such Miracles as those were which our Saviour and his Apostles wrought, and if they could but see such, they make no doubt but they should be convinced : And so for their sakes, and for the Conviction, half the Men that are born into the World, must be born *Lame or Blind*, that so they may be afterwards Cured by Miracle, for the satisfaction of these Men : And a great many must be possessed with Devils, and be grievously tormented and tortured by them, that these Men may have the Pleasure of seeing with their own Eyes the Evil Spirits cast forth, and of observing how much more calm and sober the Men are after the Devil is gone out, than they were before.

But even these Miracles, 'tis like, would not satisfy them, but some it may be, would be apt to suspect that there might

some Trick or Collusion in them, and that what they saw, is done only by a Confederacy between the Physician and Patient, to amuse and deceive the Beholders; and therefore, what they, it may be, would desire for their particular Satisfaction, would be, to see a dead Man raised to Life again, after he had been dead several Days, and began to stink; and with a Miracle as this they are sure would convince them. And for their sakes a great many Men must die two or three times over, or much oftner; because perhaps every time before they have been dead a Week, some other Person that was not present before, may have a desire to see with his own eyes the same Experiment tried over again.

But even this Miracle also would perhaps be excepted against by some, and nothing less would satisfy them than the very same Evidence which the Apostles themselves had, who conversed with our Saviour for some years together, and heard all his wise Discourses, and saw all his Miracles and mighty Works, and were present with him when he expired on the Cross, and assisted at the laying his dead Body into the Sepulchre, and within three Days after saw him alive again, touched and handled him, eat and drank with him; and after they had thus, several times, by the Space of forty Days, been given many Infallible Proofs, assured of the Reality of his Resurrection, saw him visibly taken up in his Body into Heaven. They that had this, they grant, had very good Proof and Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion; and had they but been of this happy Number, they are sure they should not only have believed, but also willingly have suffered as much as the Apostles themselves did for Bearing their Testimony to the Truth of those things which they had seen and heard.

And what now must be done for the Satisfaction of these Men? For these have as much Right to a full Satisfaction as for any others; and by the same Reason that others do expect to be gratified in what they desire, these may do so too.

And therefore in order to their Satisfaction, it is necessary that our Saviour should be Born into the World in every Age of it, or indeed much oftner; and that in every Country at

least, if not in every *Town* and *Village* he should live and Preach and do Miracles, and be Crucified and Rise again for that these things have been once done, they can't, they say, believe only upon the Testimony of other Men who say they did see them; And therefore by the same Reason, if the themselves should see them, other Men that should come after or live in other Countries, would have as little Cause to believe their Testimony.

So that for the full satisfaction of all such Doubting Men these our Saviour must have suffered often since the Beginning of the World, and must continue to do very frequently as long as the World shall last, because with some Men, nothing but seeing is Believing.

But that this should be, is what I presume none besides themselves can think it reasonable either for Men to ask, or for God to grant.

4. Lastly, The Unreasonableness of desiring any further or additional Proof of the Truth of Religion, besides what is already afforded us in the Standing Revelation of the Holy Scripture, will farther appear by considering our own Interest in being convinced and persuaded of the Truth of Religion by such Arguments and Motives as are in themselves sufficient for that purpose, altho' they be not so very strong and forcible as we could wish they were.

And this Argument I shall handle in the way of Reproof (and a just and seasonable Reproof I think it) to such bold and presuming Persons as I have been now speaking of, who will needs stand upon their Terms with Almighty God, and will not be persuaded to Believe and Repent, but just by such Reasons and such Motives as they themselves shall be pleased to require. Tell not us, say they, of *Moses* and the Prophets and of things that were done a great while ago; we know not when; We'll have fresh Revelations, and new Miracles or Messengers from the Dead, or else we will not Believe and Repent; that we are resolv'd on.

Very well; Then I say you may, if you will continue still in your Unbelief and Impenitence; Nevertheless I would advise you, before you fully determine to persist in this Resolution

Resolution, to take a little time to consider seriously, whose Interest and Concern it is, either that you should believe, or that you should not believe; consider who it is that will be a Gainer, or a Sufferer, either by the one or by the other. For let me tell you, if there be really a Heaven and a Hell, and a Judgment, and a Life to come, 'tis not your not believing them that will make them not to be; and if these things are true, 'tis your own Life and Soul that is at stake; and if you are resolv'd to lose both unless you may be saved your own way, you your selves will be the greatest, nay you your selves will be the only Sufferers.

And this is a consideration that affects the Case very much, and makes it very unreasonable to insist upon having such satisfaction in this Case, as in some other Cases might, not so very unreasonably be desired.

For if any Man tells me a Story which it is for his Interest I should believe, it is his Concern to give me such Assurance of it as I shall require, even altho' less than I require would be in all Reason sufficient; and therefore if I will not believe one or two Witnesses, tho' it may be unreasonable in me not to believe them, yet it is his Business, and what it behoves him to do, to produce if it be possible, ten or twenty Witnesses, or as many more as I shall ask for; and if one sort of Proof, tho' in it self it be never so good, will not satisfy me, it is his part, and what he ought in Reason to do, if he be able, to bring other Proofs of it; and so to go on multiplying his Witnesses and his Proofs, 'till such time as I shall declare myself fully satisfied; And the Reason is, because the Loss or Inconvenience will be his, and only his, in Case he cannot convince me of the Truth of his Relation.

But now on the other side, if the Story which he tells me be true, and it be for my Interest and Advantage only, not at all for his that I should believe it to be true; If, I say, he will be neither a Gainer nor a Loser, whether I believe his Report, or whether I do not believe it; then, if he gives me such Evidence of the Truth of it, as is sufficient to convince a Man of Reason he has done enough; he has done all that belonged to him as a Friend to do. And if after this,

I make it my Business to cavil at and to except against his Evidence, and go about to prescribe to him what sort of Proof he should give me of the Truth of what he relates; declaring withal that less or other Proof than just that which I require shall never satisfy me; he may justly reject my Suit as unreasonable, and condemn me for a Fool, that will not see my own Interest, nor know when a Friend has done enough.

And this is exactly our Case.

God has sent his Son to us with the Promise of Eternal Life, and has given us sufficient Assurance of his Divine Mission, and thereby of the Truth of that Revelation which he made. Now if we will believe this, well, and good, the Profit will be all our own; we shall save our own Souls alive; But God will receive no Advantage to himself by our Believing; his perfect Happiness being not capable of any Increase. But if we will not Believe this Testimony that God has given of his Son, if we except against his Witnesses, and cavil at his Evidence, and will not Believe but just upon that very sort of Proof which we our selves are pleas'd to pitch upon; why then, we may e'en take our own Course, we may be Unbelievers still; but 'tis we only that shall suffer by our Unbelief; the Infinite and Essential Happiness of God, being as little capable of Diminution, as of Advancement. And, as if we Believe and Repent, God will be Glorified in our Salvation; so, if we will not Believe and Repent, he will be no less glorified in our Destruction.

Seeing therefore whether you Believe or whether you do not Believe, God will be neither a Gainer nor a Loser; but the Profit or the Damage will be all your own; it is plain to your Interest as well as your Duty to give Credit to such Evidence, as really and in it self is Credible (and such, I hope I have already shewn that to be which is given us of the Truth of Christianity) and not to set your selves to cavil at it, and to study Exceptions to it; not to take upon you to prescribe to God Almighty, and boldly to tell him what sort of Evidence he must give you, or else you will not be satisfied.

Do not then stand in your own Light; do not bring Destruction upon your selves when you may avoid it; but give

what *Moses* and the *Prophets* and *Christ* and his *Apostles* speak to you in the *Holy Scriptures*; and hear them without prejudice, with a Mind ready to hearken to Reason, and resolved to be persuaded by it; and then what they will say to you will be abundantly *sufficient* to satisfy you; for they say as much in this Case (or more) as by the common Voice and Reason of all Mankind is judged to be sufficient in all other Cases of the like Nature.

But if you are resolved not to be persuaded so long as there is any possibility of Doubt or Scruple left; if you are resolved not to Believe unless you may have just that very Evidence given you that you your selves are pleased to require; if you will boldly and arrogantly take upon you to teach God, (as he knew it not) what Evidence he ought to give Men of the Truth of Religion; and are resolved to find or make Exceptions against any other; Look you to it; for if God has done enough already, he is under no manner of Obligation to do more; more, did I say? Nay, he needed not to have done so much; for it was meer Grace and Favour in God that he has done so much as he has done; that he has made us any Promises at all, and given us any Assurance of the Truth of them. And therefore for what he has done we ought to be thankful, and not to find fault with him that he has done no more. Such Impudence and Sauciness as this (for I can call it by no better a Name) from a *Man* to his *Maker*, from a *mean inconsiderable Creature*, to the *Great Lord of Heaven and Earth*, is I'm sure no proper Qualification to merit extraordinary and peculiar Favours. For, as our Saviour says to some in a like Case, so some who formerly made the like unreasonable Demand that I hope you now do, It is an *Evil and Adulterous Generation that seeketh after a Sign, and* *Matth. 12. 39.* *Mark 8. 12.* *therefore there shall no Sign be given—* *verily I say unto you, there shall no Sign be given to this Generation.*

Let us then be content with that assurance which God has given us of the Truth of Religion; for greater than this we shall not have till it be too late, Let us *thankfully accept of,* and

and readily comply with this, and not expect or wait for more; for God will not gratifie us in our unreasonable Desire. He is resolved to deal with us as with Men, to incline, not to determine our Choice; to persuade, not to force us to be Happy. And having already given us the *Standing Revelation* of the Gospel, which is *sufficient* both to instruct and convince us, and having prov'd the truth of this *sufficiently* to us, he will not be making new Revelations, or sending more Prophets divinely inspired, or working fresh Miracles every Day. He has done enough already to satisfy our sober Judgments; and he will not do every thing that we can think of to gratifie our wild and extravagant Fancies.

And there is the less Reason that he should do so, because if the ordinary Means which he uses for our Conversion do not succeed, the Fault lies wholly in us; And therefore 'tis highly probable (so certain that it need not be tried) that any other Means proper for God to use to reclaim us, would be alike unsuccessful. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the Dead.*

This is the last Reply that *Abraham* makes to the Rich Man's Request; and it was the third of those three Points which I at first propounded to speak to; but which I must reserve for the Subject of my next Discourse.

The End of the Seventh Sermon.

New

New Revelations would probably be Unsuccessful.

The EIGHTH SERMON.

St. LUKE xvi. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: But if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

IN Discourfing on these Words, I have already done these two Things.

I. I have shewn that the present *Standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is abundantly sufficient to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. This is intimated in the first Verse of the Text; *They have Moses and the Prophets; (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.* And,

II. I have likewise shewn, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is unreasonable to desire more. This was what the *Rich Man* had done at the 27th and 28th Verses; and which he still continues to do in the 2d Verse of the Text, even after *Abraham* had told him that the *standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* was sufficient; *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

He says it positively, *they will repent*; He speaks it as a thing

thing that no Doubt could be made of. In Answer to which therefore *Abraham* tells him in the last Verse of the Text, that that which he thought so very certain, was not so much as probable: *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

And this was the third Point I propounded to speak to in discoursing on these Words; *viz.*

III. To shew, that in case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the Dead, to assure them of a *Future State*, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be persuaded by the means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets* (I add, not Christ and his Apostles) *neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

And the Truth of this will, I suppose, sufficiently appear if these following things be considered. 1. That we can have *better* or *stronger Motives* to Obedience and a Holy Life, than are already offer'd in the Holy Scripture to persuade us. 2. That the Proof and Evidence already given of the Truth of Religion is such as cannot be fairly excepted against, and that there is no Proof thereof that could be offer'd, but what is liable to Cavils and unreasonable Exceptions. 3. That if God should gratifie all Men in this Request the Abundance and Commonness of the Miracles that might then be wrought would go near to destroy the Efficacy and Persuasiveness thereof. And lastly, That it is Matter of Fact and Experience that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkned to, nor been convinced by a Standing Revelation of God's Will.

I. I say, we can't possibly have, as to the *Matter* of them stronger Motives to Obedience and a Holy Life, than those which are already offer'd in the Holy Scripture to persuade us. For there we have *Life and Death set before us, Blessing and Cursing*; on one Hand, *the Promise of this Life and of the*

which is to come ; and on the other Hand all the Evils that we can justly dread, the wrath of him who is a *consuming Fire* ; who often punishes Transgressors with remarkable Judgments in this Life, and has threatned to all impenitent Sinners Eternal Torments in the next.

Now if a new Revelation was to be made, and we our selves were to contrive the *Matter* of it, what stronger Motives than these could we think of ? Or if one should come from the dead to Preach to us, if *Lazarus* were sent on purpose to persuade us, what could he offer more towards it ? Could he give us Assurance of any thing better or more desirable than of God's readiness to forgive us upon our Repentance, and of compleat and perfect Happiness both of Body and Soul to all Eternity if we do repent ? Or could he threaten any thing more like to deter us from Sin than intolerable and everlasting Misery ? If not, to what purpose should he be sent to us ? Or indeed to what purpose should there be any *new Revelation* at all ? For these Things are already promised and threatned clearly enough in the Holy Scripture ; *Life and Immortality* are already fully brought to light by the Gospel ; and of the Hope of eternal Life and Happiness, and if the Dread of everlasting and intolerable Torments will not persuade us, nothing certainly will or can persuade us.

All that, I think, could in any *new Revelation* be added to that Encouragement that is already given us in Scripture to Virtue and Godliness, or to that Discouragement that is therein given as to Vice and Wickedness, would be an Assurance that there should be always as remarkable a Difference made, by the Providence of God, between good and bad Men, in this World, as we are told in Scripture there will be, by his righteous Judgment, in *that* which is to come. And good Assurance given us of this by some *new Revelation*, confirm'd by our own constant Observation, that it was always well with the Righteous and ill with the Wicked in this World, we may think perhaps would do much more towards the Reformation of Mankind, than only those Promises and Threatnings of future Happiness or Misery that we meet with in the Scripture have done, or are ever like to do.

And

And this indeed might be. But then 'tis to be consider'd that a new Revelation to this Effect would be inconsistent with the Nature of Religion, and would frustrate the Design of God in sending us into this World, which was to prove and try us, to see whether we love the Lord with all our Heart; whether we can believe him for those Things which we do not see; and whether we are so wise as to prefer a greater future Good before a less that is present, a Blessed and Glorious Immortality after this Life, before the Pleasures of Sin which are but for a Season. For if the reward of Virtue and the Punishment of Vice were always visible and present there would be no room left for Faith in God, which is a firm Belief of the Truth of his Promises and Threatnings, tho

we do not see a present Performance of them.
Heb. 11. 1. Faith (as the Apostle defines it) is the Substance, or (a) confident Expectation of things hoped for; the Evidence, or (b) Conviction of things not seen. And if all the good things both of this Life and of the next were the certain Portion of Virtue, and all the evil Things that can be suffer'd both in this World and in

the other, were the certain and never-failing Consequence of Sin, there would be no room left for a virtuous and wise Choice; nay indeed there would be hardly matter for Choice at all; for it can't be conceiv'd that a Creature that has Understanding and a Power of chusing and refusing, should knowingly chuse all Misery rather than all Happiness. Such a Revelation as this being therefore so evidently inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion, and with the Design of God in sending us into this World, can't be expected. And I say that, bating this, there can be nothing added to the *Matter of the Scripture Revelation*. From whence therefore it plainly follows, that such as are not persuaded by the Gospel Motives to Repentance, are not capable of being persuaded by any such Motives as, consistently with the Nature of Faith and Religion and Virtue, could be offer'd them. And it can't be supposed that any true divine Revelation

shoul

should ever offer any Motives to persuade us that are not such.

But it may be said, perhaps, that tho' better or stronger motives to Repentance cannot be offer'd by any *new Revelation*, than are offered already in Holy Scripture, yet we might by a new Revelation, have better Assurance given us of the Truth of the Gospel motives; and that if we had, 'tis very like they would be then more prevailing than they now are.

And this likewise I believe must be granted. But then 'tis to be consider'd, that the Nature of Faith and Religion, and of that state of Trial which we are now in, requires that there should be a reasonable Boundary set to the clearness of that Evidence that is given to Men of the Truth of those motives whereby they are to be persuaded, as well as to the force and strength of the motives themselves; because (as I noted in my last Discourse) such very clear and strong Evidence of the Truth of Religion as leaves no room for a possibility of Doubting, would destroy our freedom of Choice, and, with it, the Virtue and Excellency of Believing; for 'tis not Faith to believe what we see and feel; and 'tis no Commendation to a Man to be good and virtuous, if his Virtue be not the fruit of a wise Judgment and a free Choice; which it would not be if his Judgment was over-born by irrefragable Demonstration. And if that farther Proof and Evidence that is desired of the Truth of Religion, be no other than such as will leave us a freedom of Choice, and a possibility of Doubting, when I say it is not likely it should be more convincing to us than that which we have already in the *Standing Revelation* of Holy Scripture. For it may be consider'd further in the second place,

2. That the Proof and Evidence already given us of the Truth of Religion is such as cannot fairly be excepted against; and that there is no Proof thereof that could be given us (unless it be such as is not resistible, and consequently such as is not for God to give us, while we are here in a state of Trial) but what is liable to foolish Cavils and unreasonable Exceptions; so that consequently the same Temper and Disposition of Mind, and the same unwillingness to believe which now

disposes Men to *Infidelity*, and prompts them to make Exceptions to the present Grounds of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect in case other Proof and Evidence were given of the Truth of it.

I say, *first*, That the Proof and Evidence already given us of the Truth of the Christian Religion is such as cannot fairly be excepted against.

To shew this has been the Design of several *Sermon III*, former Discourses. And therefore to what *IV, V, VI*, has been said I shall only add, that if the Exceptions that are made to the Evidence already given us of the Truth of the Christian Religion were fair and reasonable, they would be allow'd by Mankind to be so in other Cases of the like Nature; which yet they are not. Nay, if they who make these Exceptions in the Case of Religion did themselves think that they were just and reasonable, they ought to make the same in all other Cases, that are equally liable to the same Exceptions; and in all other such Cases they ought to live and act as if they had the same Doubts and Scruples upon them, which they say they have in the Case of Religion; But we see the quite contrary every Day to live.

For the same *Infidel* who will not allow of the Testimony which was given to our *Saviour* by his Apostles, tho' they gave the best Assurance that it was possible for Men to give both of their Knowledge of what they testified, and of their Honesty in relating it, yet readily allows that in all other Cases the Testimony of two or three credible Persons should be received, without any collateral Evidence of the Truth of their Testimony; and thinks it reasonable that all Disputes and Controversies among Men concerning their Civil Rights, their Estates, nay and their Lives too, should be thereby determined. And he that questions whether the Books of the *New Testament* were written by the reputed Authors, makes no Question but that other Books, of as ancient or older Date, and of the Authority of which there is not half so much Traditional Evidence, were written by those Persons to whom they are ascribed; and he would think those very

reasonable Men, who, when he was arguing any Point of
 learning with them upon the Authority of *Virgil*, or *Cicero*,
Seneca, should refuse to admit his Argument till he had
 undeniably and demonstratively proved that the *Aeneids*
 were written by *Virgil*, or that the other Pieces that have
 been allowed in all Ages ever since to have been written by
Cicero or *Seneca*, were not falsely Fathered upon those Au-
 thors. The *Infidel* who doubts of the Truth of the Gospel-
 History, at the same time has no Doubt at all of the Truth of
 other Histories, as ancient, and much more possible to be
 false, and of the Truth of which there is not the hundredth
 part of that Evidence that there is of the Truth of this. And
 that pretends to be uncertain whether there ever was such
 a Man as *Jesus of Nazareth*, and whether he said and did
 things Recorded of him by the *Evangelists*, and whether
 the Preaching of his Apostles he did not spread his Spiri-
 tual Empire over all the Countries of the World; (An Empire
 which is still kept up in most of the Countries over which it
 first extended, and of which there are evident *Marks* and
Memorials still remaining even in those Countries that have
 revolted from it;) He, I say, that doubts of these
 things, altho' witness'd by the *Writings* of those who were
 Eye-witnesses thereof, yet makes no Doubt but that there was
 a Man as *Alexander the Great*, who lived above Three
 hundred Years before, and that he translated the Empire of
 the World from *Persia* to *Greece*; and he also gives full
 credit to the other Things which he finds related of him,
 by *Curtius*, *Plutarch*, and *Arrian*, altho' none of these Au-
 thors were Eye-witnesses of his Wars and Greatness, but ei-
 ther Copied what they wrote from former Histories, or took
 it from Report; and altho' there are perhaps no *Remains*
 of that Empire now left in the World. And if he was but as
 the possessor of a good Estate, as that the History of *Alexander's* Ex-
 tension and Conquests is in the main a true History, he would
 I believe, give the Hundredth part of its value to ascer-
 tain his Title to it.

Those therefore are manifestly unreasonable Exceptions to
 the *Proofs of Christianity* which no Man will allow, which even

those that make them in this Case do not think reasonable make, in other Cases of the like Nature; so that it is not all likely that any Person that is not convinced by these Proofs should be convinc'd if more were given.

For (as I farther noted) there is no *Proof* that could give us of the Truth of the Christian Religion (unless be such as is not resistible, and consequently not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial) but what is liable to *foolish Cavils* and *unreasonable Exceptions*.

This I think is so self-Evident, that nothing plainer more undeniable can be said to prove it. For tho' the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion were as plain as Demonstrations in the *Mathematicks*, yet even these may be cavil'd at by such as will allow of no *Postulata's*, nor grant the Truth of the clearest *Axioms*. Nay, there have been *Scepticks* in the plainest *Matters of Sense*, and some have denied *Mathematics* at the same time that their own Tongues were moving to deny it.

Not that I think the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion is as clear as any Proposition in *Euclid*, or as the shining of the Sun at Noon (for that can't be, and I have already given Reasons why; if it might, it should not be so) but it is as clear as such a *Matter* is capable to be. And I dare boldly say that there is no other Proof of Religion fit to be offer'd, or reasonably to be desired, to which a *Sceptick* may not make as just and plausible Exceptions as he can to the standing Proofs of Christianity. For one *single Miracle* in his own Presence would be nothing near so convincing as the *many Miracles* wrought by Christ and his Apostles, of some or other of which there were more than Ten thousand Witnesses; And if he can suppose that so many were deceived in plain *Matters of Sense*, he may much rather suppose that he, a single Man, may be imposed upon. And a *resurrection* of a deceased Friend would be a *Matter* wherein one Man might be more probably Cheated, or be more easily persuaded that he was Cheated, than the *Apostles* could be in the *Resurrection* of our Lord, when he was seen by many very frequently, and sometimes by a great Company of

able together, by the space of Fourry Days. And a
 single Miracle that is over as soon as done, could not make
 such a deep and lasting Impression upon a Man's Mind, as
 that constant Power of working Miracles, and especially the
 gift of Tongues, which lasted a whole Life, must needs do
 upon the Apostles and those that lived in their time, who were
 their Partakers of these Gifts themselves, or constant Wit-
 nesses thereof in others.

In short, whatever Miracles we can desire may be wrought
 for our Conviction, either they must be seen by us with our
 own Eyes, or else they must be received by Testimony from
 others.

And tho' they should be seen by us with our own Eyes,
 yet so long as 'tis against our Inclination, or inconsistent
 with that Love which we bear to the World or to our Sins,
 we believe that they are true Miracles, we should easily be
 led to fancy that they were only melancholy Delusions, or
 tricks put upon us by Designing Men, which our first Fright
 and Amazement hinder'd us from discovering the Fraud of;
 and so they would probably have no effect at all upon us
 longer till our Fright or Amazement was well worn off.

But if we should only have an Account of them by Testi-
 mony from others, they would be yet less likely to persuade
 us; because there can be no Testimony concerning any such
 matters of Fact more clear and unexceptionable than that
 which we have already of the Truth of our Saviour's and his
 Apostles Miracles; so that if we believe not this, we should
 hardly believe any other Testimony, because we can scarce-
 ly have so good Assurance of any Mans Truth as we
 have of the Sincerity and Veracity of all those who are
 the present Witnesses to our Religion; and we can hardly
 be surer that we hear any Man whom we know, speaking to
 us, than we are that we hear the Apostles speaking to us in
 the Books of the New Testament.

And therefore I think it plainly follows (as I farther noted)
 that the same Temper and Disposition of Mind, and the same
 willingness to believe the Truths of the Gospel, which
 now dispose Men to Infidelity, and prompt them to study and

make Exceptions to the Proofs already given us of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect if other Proof and Evidence were given of it, and that Men would then quickly make as good Exceptions to that, as they do now to this. For from what has been said, I think 'tis plain that if Men do not see the Truth when 'tis plac'd in so clear a Light as 'tis in already, the Reason must be because they wilfully shut their Eyes, or else are so blinded by a Love of this World, of their sinful Lusts, that if the Light were ten times brighter than it is, they would see no more than they do now. And it would be to as little purpose, in order to the Conviction of such perverse and obstinate Men, to add any more stronger Proofs of the truth of Religion, as it would be to light up abundance of Torches to a Man that is quite blind.

For this is indeed the true cause why Men will not believe *Moses* and the Prophets, why they will not believe *Christ* and his Apostles, testifying the certainty of a future State and other Truths of Religion; 'tis not, I say, because there is any just Exception to their Testimony, but because they do not like the matter of it, and so are resolved not to believe. They love their Sins so well that they can upon no Account be persuaded to part with them, and being so resolved, it is an easie thing to cavail at any Motives or Arguments that are urged to persuade them to it; Seeing they will not see, and hearing they will not hear nor understand; and Men so obstinately resolved against Conviction, no Proof can be convincing enough.

And this is the sad effect of Love to Sin; it Viciates the Judgments of Men, so that they can't distinguish between things that differ most vastly; it darkens their Understanding so that the plainest Proposition or the clearest Consequence in the World, if it be against the Interest of Sin, seems dark and obscure to them; and it renders their Minds so averse to Religion; that they can't with any Patience so much as hear the Arguments that are offered to prove it; and be a Reason never so good, 'tis not to be hoped it should be convincing to a Man who will not hear it, or who will not allow himself calmly to consider it.

From all that hath been said therefore upon this Head, it plainly appears, That the proper Cure of Infidelity is not the Addition of more Proof of the Truth of Religion, but a right Preparation and Disposition of mind to consider well the Proof thereof that is offered; which is sufficient to convince and persuade all those that have a Love of Truth, and a Will disposed to Virtue. The Causes of Infidelity must be first removed, and then the Cure of it will be easie, by those means which God has provided and directed us to use, and there will be no need of his working Miracles for Men's Conviction; But 'till the Causes of it are removed, 'tis hardly to be Cured even by a Miracle.

But it will be said perhaps that tho' fresh Revelations and new Miracles might not be sufficient to convince all, they might however convince some; because there are several degrees in the perverseness and Obstinacy of Men; Some indeed there may be whom no such Proof of Religion as is fit to be given us in this State of Trial would persuade, whose Case therefore must be given over as desperate; but then there are others, who (as King Agrippa was) are *almost persuaded to be Christians*; Acts 26. 28. and when the Scales are already near even, a small weight put into the lightest will make it over-balance the other; so that it may reasonably be hoped that some small Addition to the Proof of Religion (no more than might be made to it without destroying either our Freedom of Choice or the Excellency of Faith and Virtue) would prevail with these Half Christians.

And perhaps it might; But God is wiser than we are, and knows better than we what is fit for him to do towards the Conversion of Men. We ought therefore to conclude that he does all that is fit to be done, tho' we do not see but that he might do more.

But this, it may be, will not be taken for an Answer, but will rather be thought a way of avoiding a difficulty too hard to be accounted for. And therefore I say further, (and it was the third thing which I proposed to be considered,)

3. That if God should gratifie all men in this Request, working new Miracles every Day for the Conviction of particu-

lar Persons; (*Sermon VII.*) (and, as I have formerly noted, there is no Reason in the World, why any one Man should be gratified in this Request rather than others, when they have all equal Reason and equal Right to desire it; should God, I say, gratifie all Men in this Request) the abundance of the miracles that must then be wrought, would be so far from adding to the Proof of Christianity, that it would rather lessen or weaken that Proof of it which we have already; because *Miracles* (the properest Proof of a Publick Divine Revelation) would not be then so convincing as they are now.

For that which most of all affects men in a *Miracle* is the Unusualness of it; because it is such a thing as was never or but rarely before ever seen or heard of; As the *Blind Man* that had been Cured by our Saviour well observes, *Job. ix. 32.* *Since the beginning of the World hath it not been heard, that any Man hath opened the Eyes of one that was born Blind.* Had it been a common thing it would have been no *Miracle*; I mean it would not have appear'd so, it would not have been thought so by Men. For that which makes Men wonder even at a true *Miracle* is not so much because it is such an Operation as they cannot give a fair Account of by Natural Causes; for this they can't do, (I'm confident I may say they have not yet done it) of many of the Works and Productions of Nature; But they therefore conclude such a thing not to be a Natural Operation, because it is not usual, because it is such a thing as was never before known to be done: And if the same thing which now, for this reason, we should Account a *Miracle* were done every day, the *Virtuosi* would presently set themselves to invent, and would quickly fancy they had found out some Natural Solution of it; And I believe there are not many *Miracles* that have been done which they might not after long study be able to give as clear and probable an Account of by Natural Causes, as they have done of Gravity, of Fire, of the Loadstone, of Vision, of the Production of Vegetables, of the Generation of Animals, and of many other things which yet are doubtless the Works and Effects of Natural Causes.

So that I say the most probable Consequence of having Miracles so very common as they must be if they were wrought for the Conviction of particular Men, would be this, that they would cease to serve for that Purpose for which Miracles were designed; because being common they would be disregarded, or would quickly be looked upon to be the Effect of Natural Causes only; There would not be wanting those that would offer to give an Account how they were done; and all those would be despised by the Scorners of Religion, as too much addicted to Superstition; who rather than attribute the greatest miracle to supernatural power, would not acquiesce in that Solution (how silly soever) that was given of it by meer matter and motion.

And in particular, I question not but that if it was a common thing for dead Men, after they had lain in their Graves for some time, to come forth again and shew themselves alive to their Friends, this wonderful Effect would be attributed by a great many to some Vital Principle in the Body, which only Slept for a while (as it does in Corn or other Seeds while they are kept dry and above Ground) but afterwards, when the Body was buried a while, was excited by some Natural virtue that was in the earth to exert it self, and so by its plastick Power formed the Body into the same shape it was in before.

This I say would in all probability be the Effect that the greatest Miracles would have in the World, if they were very common; They'd only serve to set the Philosophers Wits to work to invent new Forms of matter, and new Laws of motion by which to solve them; and any Solution of them, tho' never so probable, tho' only by Occult Qualities, would serve turn, and be thought better than to recur to an Almighty power. The consequence of which would be, that this which we desire as an additional proof of Christianity, would in effect destroy one of the best Proofs of it that we have already.

But,
4. Lastly, If it be supposed that Miracles would still be thought Miracles notwithstanding their Commonness, yet *Abraham* might well deliver it as a general Truth, to which there are none, or very few Exceptions; that he who is not wrought

wrought upon by a Standing Revelation of God's Will, wou'd not be persuaded by an extraordinary Message or a new Miracle ; because it is matter of Fact and Experience that this last method has been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearken'd to nor been convinc'd by a standing Revelation.

For this was the very Case of the Jews in our Saviour's time ; the Parable was literally fulfilled in them. For as they would not believe *Moses* and the *Prophets* testifying of our Saviour, so neither did they any more believe our Saviour himself when he came down to them from Heaven in the Power of God ; And as they did not believe him while he lived amongst them, and went about Preaching and doing Miracles, so neither did they believe him a jot more after he came again to them from the Dead. Never were there such Signs and Miracles wrought for Mens Conviction, and yet never was there such a number of obstinate Infidels as then. Very few even of those who were Eye-witnesses of our Saviour's Miracles were the better for them, but many were a great deal worse, wilfully blaspheming that Spirit by which he wrought them, and attributing those Operations to the help of the Devil which they were convinced in their own Judgments were done by the Power of God. *The opening the Eyes of the Blind*, Joh. 9. 39. 11. 47. 12. 10. did but make those that saw the Miracle more Blind than they were before ; And when once a Dead *Lazarus* did come forth out of his Grave and appear to them, (which was the very thing that the Rich Man here desires in the behalf of his Brethren, as being in his Judgment the most powerful, and so like to be the most effectual method to reclaim them ; when I say this was done by our Saviour in the presence of a great number, so that the Truth of the Miracle could not be doubted, and was not denied by any of them) all the Effect that it had upon those obstinate and incredulous Men, was only that it made them enter presently (sooner perhaps than otherwise they would have done) into a close Consultation to put to death both *Jesus* and *Lazarus* too.

Some

Some Examples indeed, it must be granted, there are on the other side ; For we are told in *Acts* xi. 41. of a great number about three thousand that believed upon the first Preaching of St. Peter, and sight of that great Miracle the Gift of Tongues, wherewith the Apostles were endued.

But then it may be considered, that it was not the Miracle that convinced them, I mean not that alone ; for many there were then present, and heard the Apostles speaking with Tongues, *Ver.* 13. were so far from being persuaded thereby that they most falsely blasphemed that, as they had done all our Saviour's miracles before, attributing the Fruit of that most evident Power of the Holy Ghost to New Wine. And it may be further Noted that those who were persuaded by it, were such as before they saw the miracle were in a good Disposition to embrace that pure Religion that is taught in the Gospel, or else that miracle would not have persuaded them ; for the Persons convinced thereby were not of the *Pharisees* or unbelieving *Jews* that had rejected our Saviour before, *ver.* 5. but they were Devout Persons, Jews or Proselytes, who had come at the Feast of Pentecost, from other parts of the World to *Jerusalem* to worship, and who had probably never heard of our Saviour before more than by uncertain Report ; but being well read in *Moses* and the Prophets, and giving good heed to them, were Converted, more by the manifest Accomplishment of all the Ancient Prophecies concerning the *Messias*, in the Person of our Saviour, than by the Sight of that great miracle.

This therefore being matter of Fact and Experience, what has been done and come to pass already, that new miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon such as have not regarded a Standing Revelation of God's will, we may reasonably infer that 'tis highly probable if not certain, that the same Experiment tried over again would have no better success.

The Sum of all therefore is this ; such as are (as S. Luke says they were who were converted by the Preaching and miracles of the Apostles) * *Predisposed or fitted for Eternal Life* ; that is, such as are modest and teachable, who

Acts 13. 46.

* ΤΕΤΑΡΜΕΝΟΙ
ΕΙΣ ΖΩΗΝ ΑΙ-
ΩΝΙΟΝ.

hear

hear without Prejudice, and judge without Partiality, and have no Interest of Sin or the world that stands in competition with their Desire to obtain everlasting Happiness ; such as enquire out the Truth with the same indifference that a Tanneller does his way, who has no inclination to one way more than to another, but only desires to be directed right, and is resolved to take that way which he is persuaded is the right, tho' it should not prove so very clean and smooth and pleasant as he hoped it would ; such, I say, as are of this Honest and Docible Mind) will be persuaded by a good Reason, especially if it be as good as the matter is capable of, tho' it falls short of Demonstration ; and if there be Reason or appearance of Reason on both sides, they will judge on that side on which the Reasons seem most weighty ; and for the Conviction of such as these, the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, being so well proved as it is, is abundantly sufficient ; so that such shall not need new Miracles or New Revelations. And on the other side, such as only do need them, that is, such as being of perverse Minds, and stubborn Wills, and devoted to Sin, will not hearken unto *Moses* and the Prophets, nor to Christ and his Apostles speaking in the Scripture, would very probably receive no Benefit from new Miracles or new Revelations. For nothing will serve to convince those who will not be convinced at all ; no Arguments can be sufficient to persuade a Man to that which he is strongly prejudiced and fully resolved against ; And this being the Case of all those who do not hear *Moses* and the Prophets, and Christ and his Apostles preaching to them in the Holy Scripture, or are not persuaded by them, we may well conclude with *Abraham* in the Text, that any other means that might be used to reclaim them would most probably prove as ineffectual, as this has been, and *that they would not be persuaded though one rose from the Dead.*

And now having shewn that the present Standing Revelation of God's Will in the Holy Scripture is sufficient to convince and persuade Men ; having also shewn that more Proof and Evidence than we have of the Truth of our Religion

gion cannot reasonably be desired. And having likewise shewn that any *other Proof* or *Evidence* thereof would probably be ineffectual upon those who will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles* preaching to them in the Holy Scripture ; I have finish'd all that I propos'd to do in discoursing on these Words.

I shall conclude all with an useful Exhortation ; *First* to *Infidels*, who will not by all that has been said be persuaded to admit this *divine Revelation* ; and *Secondly* to *Christians*, who do receive it.

1. To you who are yet *Infidels* (if there are any such here, as I hope there are not ; or if these Discourses shall happen to fall into the Hands of any such) I beg leave to address myself in a few words.

And I would desire you, in the first place, to prepare and dispose your Minds to hear gravely and without prejudice the Reasons that are offer'd to prove the Truth of Christianity, by considering seriously the *great Importance* of *Religion*, if it be true. And if you but consider this, you will quickly see that it is well worth your while to be at some pains to satisfy yourselves fully whether *Religion* be true or not. For if *Religion* be true (and you can't be sure it is not, till you have well examined the Grounds and Proofs of it) you have a great Concern at stake ; and in a matter of such moment it becomes not a wise Man to be determined by a Jest or a Quibble. And if you seriously consider the *great Importance* of *Religion*, you will likewise readily see, that of the two you had much better be mistaken in *believing* the *Truth* of *Religion*, tho' it be false, than in *disbelieving* it, if indeed it be true ; so that consequently if it can ever be reasonable for a wise Man to be under a Prejudice, it would be most reasonable that you should be prejudiced on the side of *Religion*. You will also then see, that if in any Case it be Wisdom to be over-credulous, that is, to believe beyond the strength of the Evidence, it is so in the Case of *Religion* ; because the greatest Damage you can suffer by *Over-credulity*, in case *Religion* be all a Cheat, is infinitely

infinitely less than will be Consequence of *unreasonable Infidelity*, if indeed *Religion* be true.

Next, I would desire you to examine your selves seriously, whether in your Enquiries into the Grounds and Reasons of Religion, you have not hitherto had some *Byass* upon your minds; whether at the same time that you have set your selves to consider of the Proofs of the Christian Religion, you have not secretly wished that you might not find them satisfactory to your Reason. And if so, I desire you to examine further, what was the Cause of this; whether it was not some worldly *Pleasure* or *Profit* which you foresaw you should be debarr'd from in case you should happen to be convinc'd of the Truth of the *Christian Religion*. And if it was, I hope that some serious Consideration of the great Importance of *Religion*, which I before advis'd in order to the removing unreasonable Prejudices, will also suffice to satisfy you how unworthy of any Love or Regard any worldly Pleasure or Profit is in comparison with that Eternal Happiness which is promised in the Gospel; so that consequently when you are enquiring into the Grounds and Reasons of our Hope of that eternal Life, all other Thoughts ought to be laid aside, and you ought to have no Eye at all to any thing else; because to a Man who must be unspeakably happy or miserable to all Eternity (which is the Case of all of us, if indeed *Religion* be true) 'tis not a matter worth thinking of, whether his Worldly State and Condition will be rendred better or worse by his endeavouring to secure to himself a blessed Portion in the other World.

And if by these Considerations your minds shall be freed from Prejudices, and from all *Byass* of Worldly Interest, I would, after this, desire you to take a fresh into your Consideration what has been offer'd in the foregoing Discourses for the Proof of the *Christian Religion*, and the much more that has been better said by others upon the same Argument; for there can be no hurt in considering these things over and over again, altho' after all, you should remain as unsatisfied as you are now. But I can't but hope, I can't but think that if you do

consider

consider without Prejudice or Partiality the Reasons that have been offer'd to prove the Truth of Christianity, you must needs be convinced thereby.

However, if the Reasons that are or may be offer'd for the Proof of it should not be sufficient perfectly to cure your Infidelity, and to make you become zealous Christians; they may be, and they certainly are, sufficient to satisfy you that the Christians have *some Reason* for their Belief; even the *(same* at least (if not better) that you your selves are sway'd by in all other Cases; and consequently that they are not such very easie and credulous Fools as you perhaps have hitherto taken them to be. I'm confident you must grant that if the reasons of our Religion are not demonstrative, they are at least *probable*; and that if our Religion be not true, it has at least a fair shew and Appearance of Truth.

And if you will but only allow this, 'tis then a reasonable Request, and what I would next desire of you; not to make a Boast of your Unbelief; not to *ridicule* our holy Religion; not to make it your Business to *proselyte* Men to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*.

I. Not to make a Boast of your Unbelief; For if indeed you have no Religion, yet what Interest can you have in telling the World so? Nay, is there any thing that you could do, more to your own Prejudice? For tho' you are not under the Direction and Influence of any religious Principles, yet so long as you appear to have Religion you will be employ'd and trusted as other Men are; Men will believe you to be Honest till they shall find to the contrary; and in the mean time you will have an Opportunity of raising your selves to Wealth and Honour. But when once the World shall come to know that you are Men of no Principles, that you will do whatever you can safely do for your own Advantage; that is, whatever you can do without danger of a Prison, a Pillory or a Gibbet; (and they will have reason to think all this of you, when you your selves shall tell them that you are of no Religion;) Who, do you think, will employ you? Who, do you think, will trust you? So that the only way you will then have to make your Fortunes, will be by open Force and Violence;

Violence ; and in that you will meet with such opposition all the World, as will quickly work your Ruine.

But you think, it may be, that 'tis a mean and ungentle thing to disown your Principles, or rather your *no Principle* that it is beneath a Man to seem to be what he is not ; to put on a face of Religion when he has none, how profitable soever his Hypocrisie might be to him.

Very well ; Then you may (if you are willing to the Inconvenience of it) freely own your selves to be *Religion* ; but at the same time you should do well to see that the greatest part of the World is against you ; not only the Ignorant and Illiterate, but the wisest, the most Learned and the most noble Persons have given been Men of Religion ; or at least (which is all we can say) have outwardly professed themselves persuaded of the Truth of it, and have expressed the greatest Zeal and Care for it. And therefore——

2. Tho' you do believe nothing of it your selves, as to conceal your Unbelief, you may however be civil to *Religion* ; for 'tis but good Manners to treat with respect that which those with whom you converse accounted. Besides, whether *Religion* be true or false, the matter of it is grave, and therefore ought to be handled with decent Reverence. Do not then shew such ill Breeding make that the Subject of your Sport and Railery, which besides your selves account the most serious thing in the World. Be not guilty of so much Indecency as to discourse of this matter in a manner so unsuitable to the Nature of it. If you will needs be attacking our *Religion*, compose you first to Gravity and Seriousness ; and let it be seen in your way of Treating us, and your Design is manly and good only to undeceive and disabuse us, not to make Sport of us. Produce your Cause (as the Prophet speaks) and set forth your strong Reasons, Isa. 41. 21. by them it may appear you propound them seriously, you may convince us we are in a mistake ; but we are now in too grave an Error to be wrought upon by a Jest ; and how strong soever the Objections against Religion are, by a light and trifling

expressing them, you will make them lose all their Force.
But indeed——

3. To what purpose is it for you to make it your Business, any ways, or by any Arguments, to endeavour to *proselyte* Men to Atheism and Infidelity.

For whether our Religion be true or false, it is better for you, as well as for all the World besides, that it should be generally believed; and that Men should think themselves obliged to live according to the Rules and Precepts of it. You can't, surely, be so unacquainted with the World, if you have lived any time in it, or read any thing of History, but that you must needs know that before the Principles of Atheism and Deism prevail'd so much as they have done of late Years, there was a great deal more Truth, and Justice, and Honesty, and fair Dealing in the World than there is now. So that if you should succeed in your Endeavour, if you should be able either to reason or to laugh Religion quite out of the World, the most probable, nay the most certain Consequence of it would be, that when the *Godly Man* ceased, the *faithful* would also *fall from among the Children of Men*; that then they would *speak Vanity every one with his Neighbour, with flattering Lips and with a double Heart* would they *speak*, *Psal. 12. 1, 2.* That then *Strength would be the Law of Justice, and that which is feeble would be found nothing worth*, *Wisd. 2. 11.*

If therefore you have (as you think perhaps you have) found out the *Cheat of Religion*; 'tis your best Prudence, however, to keep your Discovery to your selves. Delight your selves as much as you will with the Contemplation of your own Happiness above other Men, in that you are now freed from the Terrors of Conscience and the Fears of another World, by means of that notable Discovery which you have made of the Vanity of Religion; please your selves as much as you will with thinking that you are not now as others are, oblig'd to speak truth when 'tis to your disadvantage, to suffer any thing in this World for Conscience sake, or to be just and honest in your Dealings, when you can get considerably by

I

Fraud

Fraud and Oppression, and can order the matter so secretly as to be safe from Discovery, and consequently from all Shame and Punishment from Men: But be the Advantage which you have gained to your selves by discovering the Cheat of *Religion* never so great, yet the greater it is, and the greater you think it, so much the more cautious you ought to be, not to make known to others what you have so happily discovered; for when once others shall come to know as much as you think you do, viz. That all *Religion* is a Cheat, all your Advantage above them will cease; they will then be all upon the same Terms with you; they will then be all as much at Liberty to defraud, oppress or otherwise injure you, as you are now to defraud, oppress or injure them. You ought not therefore in Prudence, to try to convince them of their mistake, tho' you were sure it was a mistake; for why should you make it your Business to cut in sunder those Cords of *Religion*, by which they are now tied up from doing you mischief?

In a word; either *Religion* is true and well grounded, or it is not; and which soever it be, it is better both for them that do believe the Truth of it, and for you also, that they should continue in the Belief of it; why then should you be at Pains only to do mischief?

For put Case, *first*, that *Religion* is vain and groundless, it must be confessed however that it is of some present Advantage to them that do believe it; because it serves to bear them up under the unavoidable Pains and Troubles and Miseries of this mortal Life, with the comfortable Hope of a blessed Immortality; and it will be no Disadvantage to them hereafter; for when they are dead, if indeed there be no Life after this they will be as if they had never been, they will not be then in a Capacity of grieving for their Disappointment. And it is also for your present Advantage, that they that are mistaken in believing the Truth of *Religion*, should continue in their mistake; because it makes them better to you in every relation than they would otherwise be, more Just and Merciful Governours, more Loyal and Obedient Subjects, more

Loving

Loving Parents, more Dutiful Children, more Gentle Masters, more Faithful Servants, and more Just, Honest and Loving Neighbours; why then should you be at any pains to cure that mistake (if it be a mistake) which does them no harm, but rather good; and which is likewise so profitable for you? Especially when you can't be so vain as to expect to merit Heaven (if indeed there be no Heaven) by your Zeal for the *Truth* of *Atheism*.

But if indeed *Religion* be true; (and you can't be sure it is not, how deficient soever you may think our Proofs of it are) as I shall not need to say that it will be better for them that believe it, that they should persist in their Belief of it; so I shall not need to say much to shew that it will, in the Event, be better for you, that you should not endeavour to pervert them; for, certainly, if there be a Hell, they will be condemned to the hottest Place in it, who not only withdrew themselves from their Subjection to Almighty God, and would not suffer him to Reign over them; but made it also their Business to corrupt others, to form a Party against Heaven, and to raise an Universal Rebellion against God.

These things, and more to the like Purpose I would say to the *Atheists*, if I thought they were here to hear me. And And I should be without hope, that altho, what was said before in the foregoing Discourses was not sufficient to cure their Infidelity, what has been now said might serve to convince them that it then is the wisest Course to keep Infidelity to themselves; that how little soever they believe of the Truth of Religion, it is not Prudence to tell the World that they are Men of no Principles, and consequently not fit to be employed or trusted; that 'tis not good Manners to make a Jest of Serious and Sacred things, and to affront the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind; and that 'tis not for their Interest to endeavour to bring other Men over to their side, because if none had more Religion than themselves, they could not be near so safe and secure in their Rights and Possessions, and in their Lives, (the only things they value) as they now are.

But I do not think there are any here present concerned in this Part of my Discourse, and therefore shall lengthen it no further. *I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation; Heb. 6. 9.* For your Presence here, in the *House of God*, and in the Assembly of Christians, makes it reasonable to believe, that you are already convinced, not only of the *Being and Providence of God*, but likewise of the *Truth of the Christian Religion*, and of the *Divine Inspiration and Authority of the Holy Scriptures*.

2. To you therefore who are *Christians* I shall now turn my Discourse. *And I beseech you, Brethren, suffer the word of Exhortation, (Heb. 13. 22.)* it is only this.

Since you have *Moses and the Prophets*, and *Christ and his Apostles*, and believe that they are *Messengers* sent to you from God to instruct you in his Will; receive the Truth and the Law at their Mouths; mind what they say, and be careful to follow their Directions in all Things.

For even we who have the Scriptures, the lively Oracle of God, may perish for want of Knowledge as well as they that have them not, unless we make that Use of them which they were given for; unless we are diligent in reading them, and careful to practise what they teach. For the *Ric Man* spoken of in this Parable, had the Scriptures, but he meer having them did not keep him from Hell. And he *five* surviving Brethren had likewise the Scriptures, and yet were then in a fair way of following their Brother to the *Place of Torment*. *They had Moses and the Prophets but they did not hear them.*

And this also may be our Case, who have not only *the* but also *Christ and his Apostles* preaching to us; if we do not hear them; For what Advantage can it be to us to have good Instructors, if we will not mind what they say; if we stop our Ears to all their Counsels and Reproofs? No Man was ever made a Scholar only by having a good Library in his possession: No Man ever learnt any Art or Science, though he was never so well taught in any Book, only by keeping to

Book in his Chamber, or carrying it about in his Pocket. And as little shall we be the wiser only by having the Holy Scriptures, tho' (as the Apostle says) they are *able to make us wise unto Salvation*, 2 Tim. 3. 15. if we do not read and study them with an honest Design to furnish our selves from thence with a stock of useful Knowledge, and with a firm Resolution to lead our Lives according to the Directions which they give us.

Nay so far shall we be from receiving any Advantage only by our having the Holy Scriptures given us, and free Liberty allow'd us to look into them, (a Privilege we of this Nation have above most of our Neighbours) that if we do not read and study them, it will be much the worse for us; our Condemnation will be the greater, and our Destruction so much the more certain. For the Case of those who offend through Ignorance, when their Ignorance is unaffected, is very pitiable; and tho' we can't certainly say how God will deal with those who had no clear Revelation of his Will made to them; this we may be sure of, that God, who is a merciful God, will deal mercifully with them. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, says our Saviour, they had not had Sin*, John 15. 22. But the Case will be quite otherwise with those, who *knew their Master's will and did not do it*; They, as our Saviour says, *shall be beaten with many Stripes*, Luke 12. 47. And it will be all one if they did not know it, if their Ignorance of it was occasion'd by their own fault, in neglecting those means of Knowledge which God has afforded them; and much rather, if their Ignorance of their Duty was affected and chosen, that they might Sin with less disturbance of mind; for our Saviour's Judgment in this Case is very plain (and 'tis his Judgement by which we must stand or fall for all Eternity) *John 3. 19. This is the Condemnation that light is come into the World, and Men loveth Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil.*

Having therefore *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and also *Christ* and his *Apostles*, continually Preaching to us in the *Books* of Holy Scripture, let us hear them; This is both our Duty and our Interest,

And

And that our study of the Scripture may be with good success, and we may thereby be thoroughly furnished unto all good Work; Let us Pray as we are taught by our Church in a most excellent Collect suited to the Subject I have been Discussing of.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; Grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

FINIS.

